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# PREHISTORIC

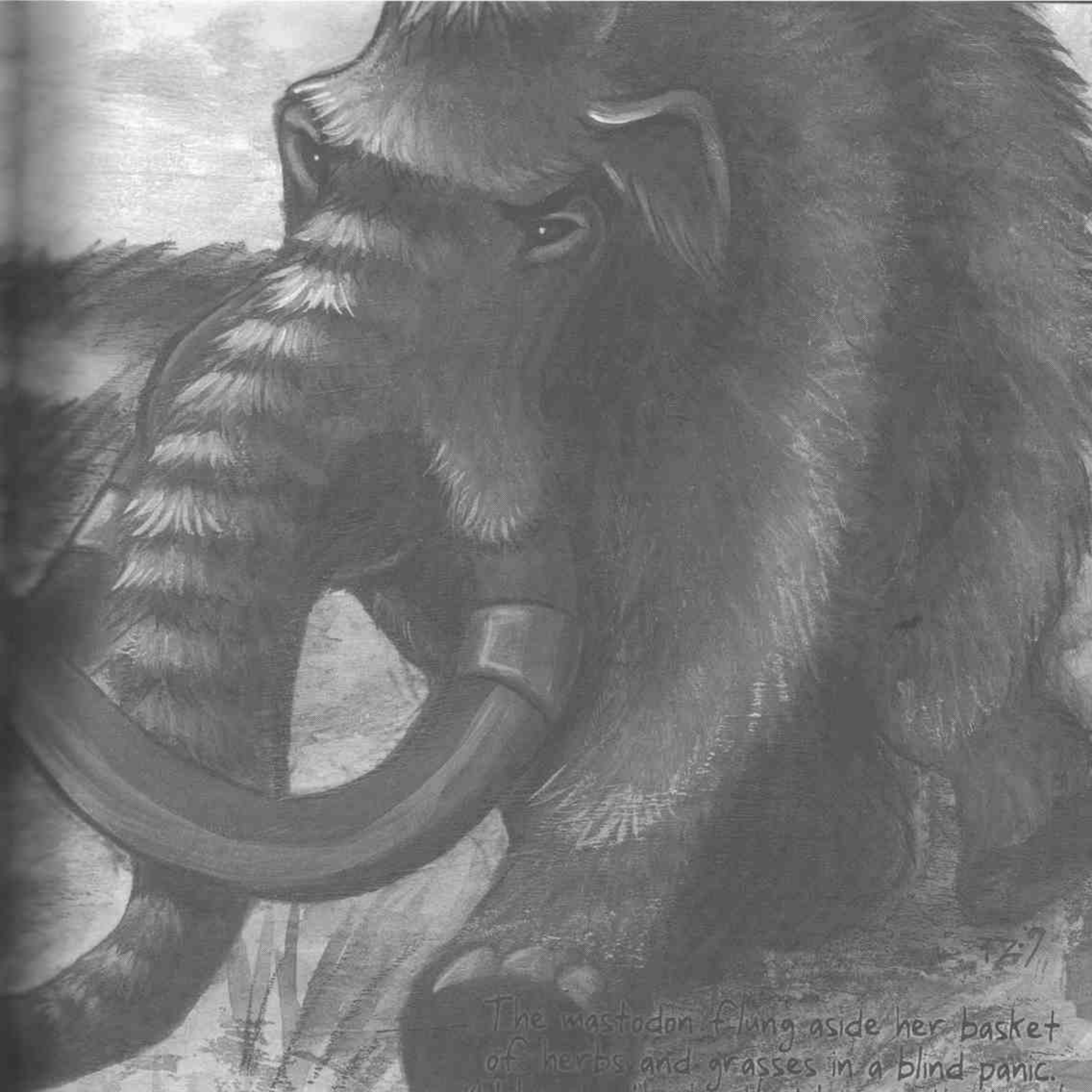
This will be easy,  
Jareth panted eagerly.

His thoughts were blasted  
by a loud trumpeting.

by Tym

illustrated by Foxfeather R. Zenkova





The mastodon flung aside her basket of herbs and grasses in a blind panic. "Wolves on the hunt! Wolves on the hunt!" she screamed in the Trade Tongue.

The hunt was over. Their quarry forgotten, the wolves scattered, desperate to elude the burgeoning stampede. Jareth bent forward, on all fours now, sacrificing visibility for speed. He barely noticed the change in the air . . .

**T**he rocks knew, and the trees. Gods damn them! He, Jareth, son of Aerath, was alive! But he watched, silent, as his father, the alpha dire wolf, placed Jareth's few belongings in the middle of the pack's firepit.

Aerath stood, lifted his loincloth and his leg, and—howling his first and only lament for his offspring—urinated on the meager pile of skins and tools. When his father had finished, Jareth resisted the urge to follow suit; he was no longer second after his father. His step-brother, still a pup, was held up. His howl was little more than a mewling cry, and Jareth suspected that he had been gorged on water so that he could piddle on cue. It was the duty of every pack member to mark the dead (or his possessions)—to allow their spirit to join with the pack's ancestors. He turned away; there had been so many such ceremonies over the course of his two-dozen years. After every dire wolf in the pack—from old Suunp, the patch-furred shamaness who was halfway to the spirit world herself, to the litter born to Meh and Ylba two days ago, and still-unnamed—had marked it, the sodden pile would be burnt under a large bonfire while the pack danced and Suunp sang. The wolves—his friends and family—would gather and together say his name for the last time. The dead are not named after that.

Slinking away from the growing light of the bonfire, he saw a glint: the distant firelight caught in Ta'al's deep brown eyes as he watched Jareth's approach. The *Equus lambei*—an unassuming steppe pony—sat cross-legged with his back to a straggly lone pine. He had been plaiting grasses, his hoof-like fingernails clicking rhythmically; he didn't take his eyes off the dire wolf. "It was too late?" His voice was soft, like the rumbling of a distant stampede.

"Days ago would have been too late. I'm dead now."

"Only to them."



It had been one of the first hunts in several seasons. Carrion was scarce, and even the dangerous tar pits proved fruitless. So the pack, after a council at which Jareth himself fully endorsed

the proposed hunt, had chosen the fleetest and most successful hunters. These included Jareth and Meh—already tired of his litter's pitiful whimpers (Ylba's dugs, it was whispered, were bone dry, and her health as poor as the pups')—as well as the twins Tomay and Tomai, and Kar.

Kar, as daughter of the pack's omega, was not content to join her father as the butt of all jokes. The night her mother had died, many years ago, Kar had disappeared. When she had returned—just before her own funeral was to begin—it was with a vulture draped over her back. Its wingspan was easily twice her height, the spear still protruding from its ribs. There were no jokes about her father for many days after that, and Kar was allowed several of the bird's feathers, which she thereafter wore tied in her fur. That night, as the fire was burning low, Aerath turned to his son. "When you come of age and take my place—" he held up a paw to staunch Jareth's response—the expected formula expressing the desire for the alpha's unending dominance, "—as you will in the fullness of time, *she* would be one to watch. Such a strong huntress will beget a strong litter."

Now, trailing behind her as they skirted the larger herds of camel and bison, he had to agree with his father. Her speech was rough and clipped, as though she were always on the hunt, and she did not catch his attention the way his pack-brothers did, but Jareth had to admit that, as alpha-bitch, she would have no equal. At that moment she snarled and loped forward. The hominids they had been stalking (tough meat, but far safer than going after larger prey) had sprung from the bushes and, chattering, dashed off into the prairie. *This will be easy.* Jareth panted eagerly. *They won't have trees and bushes to hide behind.* His thoughts were blasted by a loud trumpeting. He chanced a glance around: Tomay had skidded a turn—the dust still rising—sliding into the hairy wall of a mastodon's flank. She (only the cows would have tusks like that, almost as long as Tomay was tall) flung aside her basket of herbs and grasses in a blind panic. "Wolves on the hunt! Wolves on the hunt!" she screamed in the Trade Tongue.

The hunt was over. Their quarry forgotten, the wolves scattered, desperate to elude the

burgeoning stampede. Jareth thought he saw a lupine tail—flung straight out in flight—disappear over a hillock. He bent forward, on all fours now, sacrificing visibility for speed. He barely noticed the change in the air: it smelled cooler, wetter, almost empty.

The ground yanked itself from under his paws as he, still running, shot over the edge of the cliff. The fall was not far, but the smack of the water in which he landed knocked the breath out of him, and the swiftness of the current dragged and tumbled him until he was barely conscious. He was not even aware of the thunderous splashes behind him as several stampedeers fell in, blind panic having blotted out any awareness of their surroundings. If found, their carcasses would provide the pack with many weeks' worth of cured meat.



Jareth awoke to blackness and a cool damp weight on his face. *I am blind*, he thought, for there was no difference whether he opened his eyes or not. His ears twitched, catching a rustle of movement, and then he was truly—if momentarily—blinded by harsh daylight. "Gahh!" He scrunched his muzzle into a pained snarl.

"Ah, you wake." It was a low voice, and spoke with the Trade Tongue. "You may open your eyes, ah, but slowly."

Skittish and uncertain, Jareth first opened his nostrils. He was rewarded with a blast of warm green scent: steppe pony. He had not smelled this one (a young male, though probably little younger than he himself was) before, but Jareth's pack only infrequently traded with the stout, brown-striped horses. More often there would merely be a stack of tightly-woven baskets, filled with grain, lying beside a dead Equus. The older ones were especially tough, but Jareth had once found a colt, trampled by a stampede. His meat had been quite good, once it was picked clean of bone shards.

Tentatively, Jareth again opened his eyes and found himself looking up, not at the sun, but merely a small circle of late afternoon sky. Turning to the side, he saw a set of thick black fingernails resting lightly on a pair of dun-furred knees. The horse's long muzzle arced down

into his field of vision. "So you can hear. Can you speak, friend wolf? Tell me your name."

"Jareth," he croaked. His throat was raw and his tongue inexplicably thick and unwieldy.

"Jerrrith. A good name. Mine is Ta'al." He pronounced it with a sort of nicker, just as Jareth's name was half-grown.

"You must not be good at swimming, friend Jareth. My herd was grazing by the..." he paused, snorted, and—unable to think of a more succinct translation into the Trade Tongue—continued: "by the River-that-flows-down-from-the-Uplands, and one foal saw you floating like a storm-broken branch." Ta'al sat back, as if the brief story had explained everything.

Jareth was confused. He had only just a few moments ago been hunting with Kar and the twins. But why was he so tired, and why did he ache? He thought, perhaps, that he had simply fallen asleep; but if so, his dreams had been disturbed and filled with pain and noise.

Ta'al seemed able to read the wolf's somewhat-crosseyed look of introspection. He rocked back on his hooves, reaching for something outside of Jareth's field of vision. There was a clinking and the horse's hand came back holding a tiny clay vessel. He proceeded to fill it with clear water from a jar. "To the Gods," he intoned, pouring half of it onto Jareth's head and the rest on his own. It only amounted to a few drops of water, but when the libation seeped through Jareth's fur to the skin, it was enough to bring him out of his stupor.

"How long—" his throat was dry and sore.

"Do not speak." Ta'al held off from answering Jareth's unfinished question. Instead, he again reached for the jug and filled a cup not much bigger than the offertory vessel. Pressing it gently against the wolf's dark lower lip, he tipped it. "Just lap at it, my friend. Go slow." He didn't move as he watched the sluggish flick of pink, in and out. After a few minutes, the cup was half-emptied, and Ta'al spoke again: "You slept for three days—" he placed a firm hand against the wolf's chest, able to keep him stationary with little effort. "No. Lay back. I'm sure your herd is still searching. If they do not find us first, I will

take you to them—" again, he rested his thick hand on Jareth's chest, preventing him from rising, "—after you have healed. Rest now. If you have need, make noise and I will come."

Before standing to go, Ta'al leaned forward and lipped at the fur between Jareth's ears; it felt as though he were being grazed.

Ta'al left him alone with his thoughts. *Three nights. And how long was I in the river?* His fur prickled at the thought of so much water. He didn't know—couldn't begin to guess—how far he had been carried from his pack's territory. He suppressed a pupish whimper: the funeral ceremony. Even without a body, it would be only a matter of time.

An internal pressure which had been building unheeded now pressed itself against Jareth's thoughts. Behind his sheath, his bladder felt like a rotten carcass, ready to burst. As he struggled to sit up, or even to roll over, he found that he could not. His arms, legs, and most of his chest were swathed in grey herbiferous mud. It had dried, sticking his fur into rigid clumps and rendering him mostly motionless.

His bladder clenched again and for a moment Jareth toyed with the idea of just relaxing, letting it flow where he lay; perhaps it would dampen the poultices enough so

that he could rise and sneak out to find his pack.

He dismissed the thought: he was no pup, to soil himself like that. Besides, he was now duty-bound to his host—in theory, anyways. As he shifted slightly, the mud cracked and crumbled, allowing him some freedom. He bent his elbow experimentally; the pain made him bite his lip until he could taste blood. This confirmed his decision: he was going nowhere for the moment.

So he winced, licked his lip clean, and howled (his voice was still raw, and the mournful tone barely seemed to carry out of the horse's hut): "Taaaaaaal!" He was rewarded by the cllop of hooves on beaten earth.

"Jareth?" The horse was out of breath, nostrils flaring as he looked down.

"I have need..." Jareth croaked. *Damn, what is the trade-word?* He could not think, could only stare up with wide eyes. Luckily, Ta'al caught the motion of the wolf's sheath as he tried to contain himself.

"Water-making?" Without waiting for a response, Ta'al bent to retrieve yet another





earthenware vessel—this one flat and long. He placed it in the middle of Jareth's belly, just above his sheath's opening.

"Ah, already you are ready," Ta'al chortled at the finger's-breadth of light pink poking out of the dark fur. With deft fingers, he pried back the fleshy tube, then he slid the shallow trough underneath the tip of Jareth's member. "Easy, boy," he said, as though trying to calm a skittish foal. "Relax and allow it to flow."

Jareth whimpered. It was not the touch of another male that confused him, but that he had fallen so low as to be unable to even relieve himself without the aid of a *prey*. The pain of a distended bladder, however, was more than enough to quash any reservations.

The flow was strong and broad, Ta'al noted. He used one hand to steady both bowl and member, and with the other deflected back any overspray. When the wolf was finished, Ta'al used a finger to wipe the last drop from Jareth's cocktip, then allowed it to slip back inside. He stood, carrying the bowl out to the river. As he walked, he sniffed at the short damp hair on the back of his hand.

Relaxed now, Jareth looked up through the hut's smoke hole and watched the sky darken and the stars come out. He could just make out the tail and hindpaw of Baren's constellation in the twilight sky. The starry-wolf had been the leader of his own pack, the most skilled hunter for generations, and a master of the Howl. It was he who learned the Trade Tongues of the herds, and he who used them. He was killed by a stampede, and his broken body was lifted to the sky, where his funeral fires would burn forever on in his twisted limbs.

The constellation had been Jareth's favorite since he was a pup. Easily recognizable among the milk-spray confusion of stars, it now filled him with a reassuring calm. He could picture the rest of the constellation, invisible beyond the hut's roof, the arms and legs splayed like a good-luck swastika. *Why didn't I die like him?* Jareth wondered. *What if I was meant to?* The thought filled him with horror: to knowingly go against one's fate was a terrible thing, an act of the depraved and insane. And who was he to know if he had willed himself to dodge the

rocks and dead mastodons, to fight the current and wash up where he could be found by that foal.

He would have to end it before the *horse* returned. The poultice on his chest was dry and hard. Mud crumbled from the edges, but he dug his claws under and lifted with a strength he had not expected from his battered body. Jareth's howl pierced the night as the fur was ripped from his chest in clumps; several dozen equine ears swiveled towards the healer's hut. There was the crash of pottery on river rock and the thud of hoofbeats.

Blinking tears from his eyes, Jareth glanced wildly around the hut. There, well within his reach, was an obsidian knife Ta'al had used for cutting herbs. The dire wolf flung out an arm, wincing as the sharpened stone sliced easily through a pawpad. But he braced his formidable jaw: *I am no pup; I am the Leader's son!*

Despite his resolve, the slashed pad made his paw clumsy, and the blood was slippery on the knife's reed-wrapped handle. At last, it was in his paw, his grip as firm now as his conviction. "*Faaaaaaate!*" He snarled and drove the knife towards his ribs.

There was no pain. No warmth and smell of spurting blood. His eyes opened—had he closed them?—and he saw two black-striped columns of brown stretching between his upturned muzzle and the hut's roof, angling to meet at his chest like two tributaries. He lashed out in fury, teeth sinking into one of the thick arms. The horse's grip on the knife didn't falter—there was only a snort from somewhere behind Jareth's head, in the direction of the hut's only doorway.

Jareth could taste blood, could feel the hair and muscle twitch against his gums. Slowly, as though he were entering a Spirit-Trance, he could feel his body relaxing, his jaw opening, his paw loosing its hold. Just as slowly, as though he were sharing the same dream, Ta'al lifted the knife away, set it on a high shelf, rocked back on his hooves, squatted, and looked down at his "guest."

The silence was hard to break. "Why?" the word was hardly louder than a nicker.

"I—" the blood—Ta'al's blood—seemed to stick Jareth's mouth shut, choking him. He licked dry lips with a drier tongue: "my..." Unable to speak, he gestured weakly at the sky-circle above them; Baren had shifted and was now almost fully visible, watching them both.

"The stars? That is the tail of Mare Mother—why, friend wolf, should—" Ta'al clearly didn't understand.

Jareth shook his head and explained, hastily, the story of the greatest pack Leader. His voice—unfettered now—was low and hoarse, tears flowed unheeded: "I have escaped my—" he growled, searching for the word, "—my fate. I am lost." *Lost*. He had to admit it, now that he had twice failed. "Looooooost." The howl was high and round, bobbing occasionally from Jareth's sobs.

In a smooth motion that surprised them both, Ta'al leaned forward and wrapped his arms around the mourning wolf. Jareth's lament was silenced by the equine muzzle laid alongside his own. He could feel the sticky, half-dried crust of blood on Ta'al's arm tugging at his nape-fur. He couldn't say anything—wouldn't have been able, even in his own language, to verbalize the formless thoughts and feelings that clustered around the waterhole of his mind.

Above them, Baren's funeral stars burned on.



It wasn't the morning light that woke Jareth. Neither was it Ta'al's occasional herbivorous gurgle. What finally broke the black *nothing* of his sleep was an insistent tug on his ear. Awareness filtered in slowly: lip-bite-lip-bite. Ta'al was grazing. In his sleep. On Jareth's ear. He shifted, hoping to dislodge the horse, push him to one side, but stopped. There was something warm and smooth lying across his leg. *A snake*. He held still, hardly daring to breathe, trying not to think what might have happened had he rolled over or kicked out in his sleep. The only thing to do was wait. Snakes found warm places to sleep at night, so if Jareth could hold still until after dawn, it might wake up and go away. *But in the hut, in the shade, it might be noon before the Sun can get through that hole*. The circle of sky above

him seemed so tiny compared with the night's multitude of stars; the hut so cold.

Ta'al's warm damp breath startled Jareth. He could hear the horse's thick tongue working, licking at lips dusted with coarse wolf fur. Ta'al moaned and stretched—the snake moved.

"Snaaaake!" Jareth hissed through his teeth, afraid to even open his mouth.

Ta'al caught the urgency in his voice. Slowly, he slung his long muzzle around, eyes wide as he searched for the reptile. They had had neither skin blanket nor woven mat over them that night—their combined warmth and fur enough to banish the summer evening's chill—so it was easy for Ta'al to survey their bodies. He chuckled deeply and stood.

The snake slithered up. Jareth tensed, readied himself for the strike and the pierce and the flood of venom.

"Relax, friend. Look." Ta'al was holding something dark in his hand. The pre-dawn light glinted greily from its edges. The snake...

Jareth barked out a laugh. His sleep-dulled senses had mistaken a treat for a threat. He licked sleep-dry lips and examined the healer's length. It was—it looked to be a comfortable handful, bigger than his packbrothers', but certainly no larger than others he'd seen on the grassland. (Many of the herds eschewed loincloths, of any sort, while grazing). Jareth blinked: the horse hadn't moved, was still holding his dark-skinned cock in his hand...and he seemed to be returning the wolf's stare in kind. Ta'al's grin revealed his buck teeth; Jareth licked his canines sympathetically and giggled.

"How feel you, friend wolf? Your root, at least, is well." Seeing Jareth's confused look, he gestured with his hand—still holding his own member—at Jareth's groin. His sheath was pulled taut, his pink "root" rigid and swelling, pulsing visibly with his quickened heartbeat.

Embarrassed, his ears folded back and he moved his paws to cover himself. *He's mocking me!* Jareth screwed his eyes shut, tensed, and waited for the rain of hoof-kicks. Some herds did that, he knew: any herdsman who wouldn't

breed would be literally kicked out. His pack had had to dispose of such unfortunates on more than one occasion. They had all died of pain and blood loss, their faces—white beneath matted fur—contorted in agony, their hands crushed into their groins, any move towards self-protection further enraging their former friends and family.

Instead of hard, unyielding hoof crashing into his flesh, he felt a rough, thick-fingered hand on his shoulder. "You fear..." Ta'al could easily read the terror in the wolf's now-open eyes, see the cause in the paws hiding a dwindling erection.

Jareth couldn't fathom the deep dark of the horse's eyes; his words seemed to have a note of disdain: the wolf was scared as a pup in a thunderstorm. So when he felt the horse's hands brusquely pulling at his paws, he put up no resistance. He could see the steppe pony's open mouth hovering above his belly, the teeth wickedly blunt. Once more, Jareth son of Aerath, closed his eyes and awaited his fate.

Warm, insistent lips forced his sheath down. *He's done this before. He's going to peel it like a ripe fruit.* Teeth slid against thin red skin. *He's not just their healer, he's his herd's—"Yelp!"*

Ta'al wrapped his tongue around the wolf's length, closing his lips around its base. His own root was twitching against his folded legs, but it would wait. Duty, as a healer, came first. The wolf was still tense, but for a different reason; perhaps he would sleep again after he was emptied.

Jareth's thoughts were no longer coherent. His mind flipped through images like looking through tree trunks at a full run. His father; Kar, crouched before him on a hunt; bathing himself—the closest he'd ever come to what Ta'al was now doing to him; his pack brothers, huddled together on their Adulting ceremony. He tried to think of Kar again: if he ever got home (a fleeting worry) he would have to court her, mate her. She appeared before him, long summer grass waving behind her, vulture feathers dangling from her long headfur. The indistinct trumpeting voices of mammoths filling the air in time with his panting breath. She grinned—lopsided as she did when she played a trick, which was a rare occasion—and her

short loincloth billowed out. Jareth grunted; Ta'al placed a gentle hand on his balls, fingers exploring the short-fuzzed sack as though checking to see if they were ripe.

She was saying something, her tongue long and unwieldy within her small muzzle. Jareth looked down again: a long black snake had emerged from under the ragged skin of her loincloth. Hissing lowly, it wrapped around her legs, biting each paw, its poison hardening them into thick hooves. She approached him, shaking the ground with each step. He whimpered as she leaned close. Her ice-blue eyes leered at him, even as they clouded over like the sky before a storm, turning dark. She whispered something, her muzzle stretching out to fit her tongue, her fur fuzzing out into coarse hair, her nostrils flaring as she snorted down at his groin.

In some part of his mind, he knew that his knot was swelling for the third time in his entire life.

Kar wavered in a growing breeze, swelling like the bladders they had inflated and played with as pups. Slowly, she lifted one leg—Jareth could see the ropes of muscle writhing beneath skin and hair—and held it, hovering above his chest. Dangling above him and well out of his reach, was a full set of equine genitals—*male* genitals. Kar was Kar no more. The giant Ta'al nickered above him and lowered his hoof towards Jareth's ribs.

With his face buried between Jareth's legs, Ta'al placed a hand on the wolf's chest to steady himself. The shudder and spurt of semen startled Ta'al—he had only been sucking for a few moments, and now the wolf was bucking his hips against his muzzle. Ta'al kept his mouth wide, used his tongue to guide and squeeze the jerking root, and swallowed down the seed that clung to the back of his throat.



Jareth's throat felt raw—like he had been howling for hours. Something hot and wet was on his sheath—had he marked himself? He hoped not: too tired to wash it off, he still didn't want it to dry into his skin and fur. He reached down blindly: something was down there—some-

thing that was not him. He opened his eyes and remembered.

Ta'al looked up, saw Jareth's yellow eyes, and sat up, giving the dwindling member a long slurp in the process. Neither spoke as each watched the other.

"I..." Jareth stopped, licked his lips. His glance darted around the hut, trying to find something to latch onto, something on which to build a thought. Finding nothing, it returned to Ta'al, still silent, still waiting. Then he decided.

Ta'al watched as the wolf shifted, rolled to his side, propped himself up on one arm, the dried mud crumbling around him. The horse glanced quickly, irrationally, up at the knife—still on its shelf—then back at the crouched form of Jareth. The wolf licked his lips once more, then slowly nosed his way towards Ta'al's own sheath.

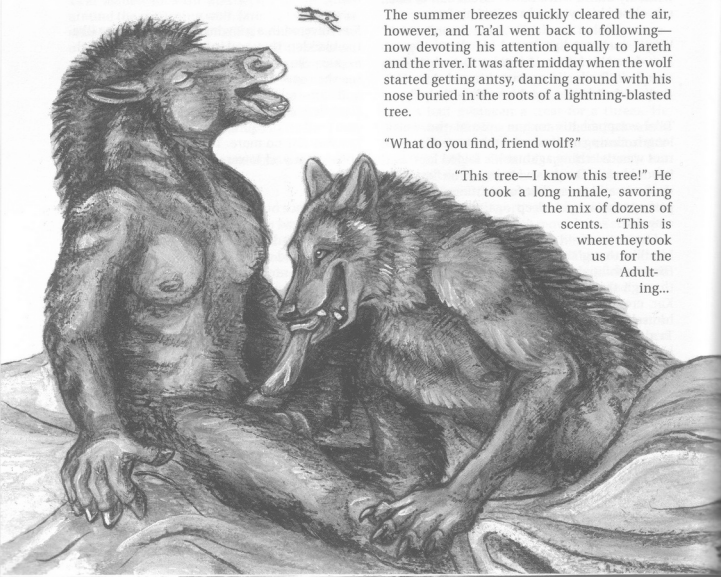
The next morning they set out to find Jareth's pack. The wolf couldn't stand to stay still any longer, and it was easy to convince Ta'al. As they walked, the horse kept a close eye on his guest: he could see the determination in Jareth's eyes, but healing took time. So he watched closely for any stumble or faltering.

They did not talk. Jareth's whole being was focused in his nose, sniffing for any sign of his pack, and Ta'al was content to follow him as they progressed up the river. It did not take them very long to find scents the wolf found familiar—beginning with the sweet stench of rotting flesh: several of the mammoths who had plunged into the gorge after Jareth had become lodged in the rocks and were now bloated, waterlogged, and long-dead. Ta'al had seen death before, but the sight of so much (and, perhaps, the thought that Jareth could easily have been buried somewhere in that stinking mass) made him stride ahead of the wolf.

The summer breezes quickly cleared the air, however, and Ta'al went back to following—now devoting his attention equally to Jareth and the river. It was after midday when the wolf started getting antsy, dancing around with his nose buried in the roots of a lightning-blasted tree.

"What do you find, friend wolf?"

"This tree—I know this tree!" He took a long inhale, savoring the mix of dozens of scents. "This is where they took us for the Adult-ing..."



There I am, right there." He pointed at a burl of charred wood indistinguishable from any other to the horse. "This is the farthest I'd ever been from the cave...until now," and he smiled, which surprised Ta'al.

The going was quick after that, the scents of his pack growing stronger, fresher in his nose. Soon they were both loping along, each easily keeping pace with the other. The tree had been a good sign: not only had they reached the outskirts of Jareth's pack's territory, but they were also on the right side of the deepening gorge. They would not have to cross it.

As the sun dipped low and the stars winked into existence—Baren had not yet risen—Jareth seemed to run even faster, as though driven on by the very winds themselves. He could see, on the far horizon, the bulge and wrinkle of the Stones. The Stones where his pack's cave was. The Stones that were lit by flickering torches—too many for a normal night, far too many.

He whimpered as he ran, and Ta'al could sense his distress. "They have begun your... sending?"

Jareth needed no translation. "Yes, but it's only been...they can't have..." He was panting hard, mind and mouth unable to form or finish full thoughts, his whole being devoted solely to running.

After a long while, they crested a hill. The whole pack, some holding torches, others just standing, was clustered around a pile of miscellaneous objects in the pack's firepit. An old she-wolf was saying something Ta'al didn't understand, but he could see that they were indeed too late.

"Once it's begun," Jareth said, as though repeating a cardinal rule, "it cannot be stopped."

Ta'al left, silently and unnoticed, to let Jareth suffer through his own burial alone. He would be waiting for him.



Ta'al was indeed waiting, weaving long strands of grass into a tight rope. His hands knew their work, allowing him to simply lean against the

rough bark of the pine tree and watch the stars. A long howl made him look in the direction of the fire-lit rocks. Soon, Jareth loomed up out of the darkness, his shoulders drooping, his tail hanging straight down as he walked. When he came close enough, Ta'al stopped braiding and said, "It was too late?"

Jareth heaved a sigh, not even lifting his head to look at the steppe pony. "Days ago would have been too late. I'm dead now."

"Only to them."

This statement seemed to shock the wolf. He looked up, into the dark eyes of the shaman.

"You still breathe, friend wolf. You still breathe."

"But I have nowhere to go. I have no tribe, no—"

The horse had laid aside his rope and stood, leaning close to whisper in Jareth's ear, "You have no need of a tribe, friend wolf. You are... not yet healed," he added with a smile so slight that Jareth thought he might have imagined it. "We will rest tonight, and tomorrow go back to the village."

Jareth was silent, staring into the horse's face. Behind them the small campfire roared up into a blaze as tall as The Stones themselves. Suunp began her wavering howl of a song, and drums could be heard echoing out over the plains. Baren was up now, having begun his nightly trek through the dark low-hanging sky. And still Jareth stood. Then he moved: he did not turn to look back at the blaze that was his old life, and he did not lie down to stare at the stars. Instead, he turned and began walking. His steps were slow, measured, as though he were concentrating on each muscle as it pulled and released; he held his muzzle straight out, his paws limp at his sides. He did not look around—he did not need to, to know that a pair of thick hooves was matching his paws step-for-step.





# SATED, BY FROSTWOLF

ILLUSTRATED BY BLOTCH

*I'll stalk through the woods and traipse through the trees,  
Through the night and through the day  
Not allowed back until I've caught my first prey.*



*Said the wolf to the scent of the buck on the trail.  
So the wolf prowled along and the scent carried on  
and by some stroke the wind did shift.*

*I smell you now,  
prowling through the woods.  
From the tips of your ears  
to the dirt on your paws.  
From the lack of other scents,  
I know you are alone.*

*You'll trace me through the woods, and follow.  
But we'll see who's the prey  
and we'll see who's caught.*

*I still have your scent  
and that you'll be my prey is certain.  
Other musks have assailed me, but  
I'm not allowed back until I've caught my first prey,  
which happens to be you.*

*Said the wolf to scent of the buck on the trail,  
and the ember that sparked.*

*The trail of the wolf  
on the stream of the buck  
on the way to the road grew close.*

*I know that you are close, but you'd be be hurrying.  
Only here a bit more, busy day tomorrow.*

*I've followed you  
through the brush and towards the asphalt river.  
Other scents have crossed  
But they are not my prey  
and I'll follow you through the night and day.  
I've caught my food, but still I hunger for more,  
and you'll be my prey yet.*

*Said the wolf to strong scent of the buck near the road.*

*We'll see just how dedicated you are.  
You can traipse through the trees  
and stalk me through the woods,  
but I live a few hours by car from this patch of wood.  
Said the buck to the wind  
by the scent to the nose of the wolf.*

*I've followed the trail and stalked every bit of your scent.  
Tracked through the woods and brush, past the asphalt river.  
Dodged cars, through the roads and the streets.  
I'll have my prey and not return without you.  
The hunger keeps growing and the ember glows brighter.  
But I will find you, my nose doesn't lie.*

*Said the wolf to the door to the office of the buck.  
Who'd stalked through the woods and traipsed through the trees.  
Now hidden in a supply closet. Scent masked by copy toner.*



*So I guess he's off my trail, and I shouldn't have driven away.  
Work calls and I suppose wild things can't drive.*

*Thought the buck to himself as his scent led a trail  
To the office near the supply closet near the wolf with the fire.*

*The day wore on and the meetings were cancelled  
Buck pants drop down and office door locks.  
A hoof slides south and scents rise.*

*I've found you now.  
Thought the wolf to himself  
as the musk crept inside*

*His flared nose as the flames fanned.  
Who then pounced out the closet,  
from the trail to his prey.*

*As luck would have it  
the secretary outside the office  
didn't hear*

*the crashing of the buck underneath  
the pouncing of the wolf and the lock  
of muzzle on muzzle, lips on lips*

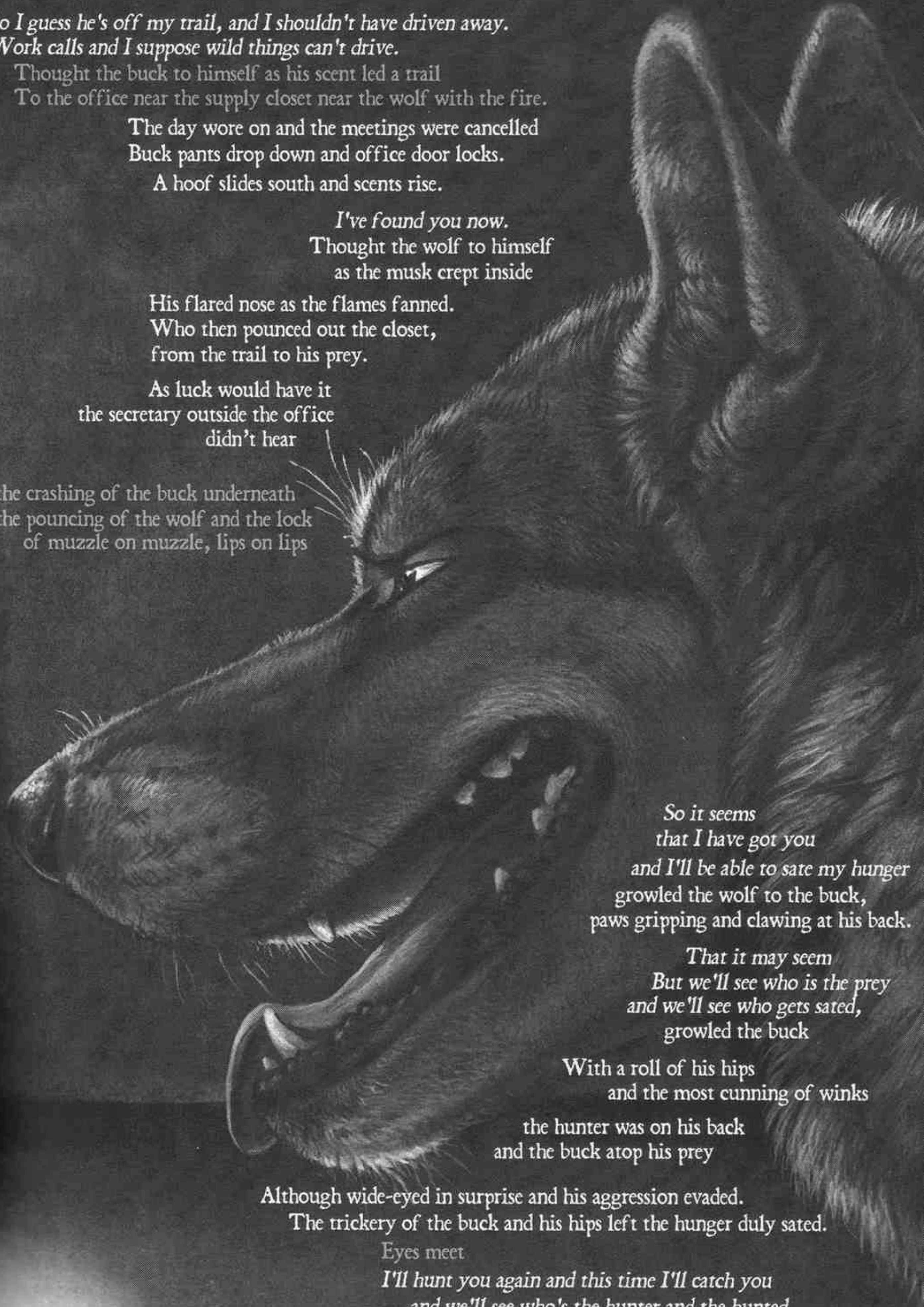
*So it seems  
that I have got you  
and I'll be able to sate my hunger  
growled the wolf to the buck,  
paws gripping and clawing at his back.*

*That it may seem  
But we'll see who is the prey  
and we'll see who gets sated,  
growled the buck*

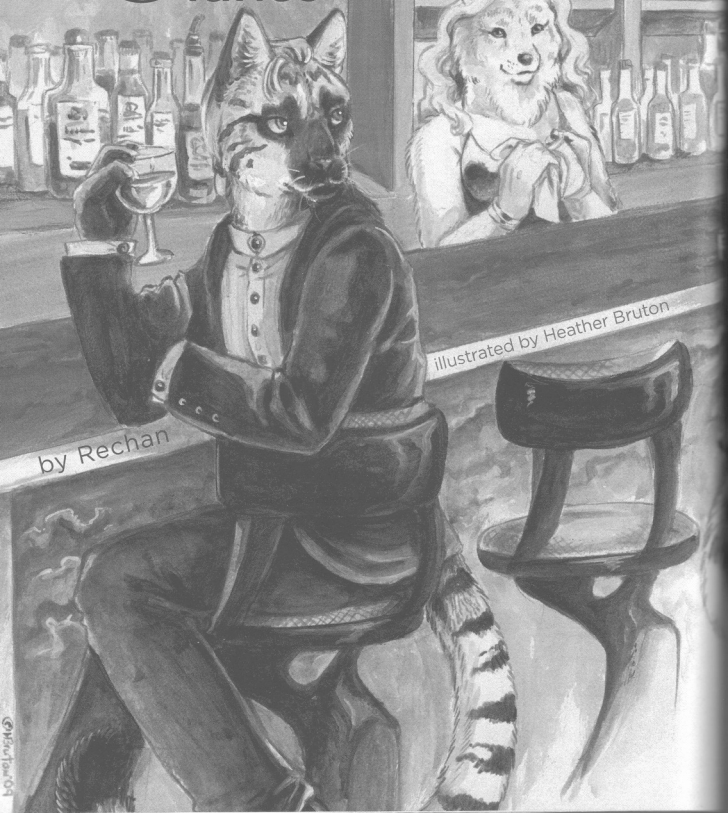
*With a roll of his hips  
and the most cunning of winks  
the hunter was on his back  
and the buck atop his prey*

*Although wide-eyed in surprise and his aggression evaded.  
The trickery of the buck and his hips left the hunger duly sated.  
Eyes meet*

*I'll hunt you again and this time I'll catch you  
and we'll see who's the hunter and the hunted  
and if I have to traipse through trees or hide among printers  
I'm not returning until I've caught my prey.*



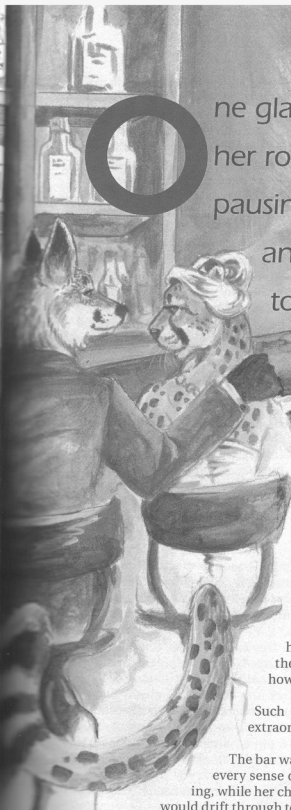
# At a Glance



by Rechan

illustrated by Heather Bruton





ne glance from across the room,  
her round ears and black onyx eyes  
pausing to focus directly on him,  
and he was filled with the need  
to capture her attention again.

The reason for the gala was unimportant; it was yet another who's who of the city who had gathered to be seen with groomed fur blessed by a high caliber stylist and their fashion and jewelry fit enough to fund the tuition of a lesser mortal.

His presence was a necessary evil of his profession. The blazer, tuxedo shirt and slacks with their sensible shoes were no match for the glamour surrounding him. Nor was his heritage as upstanding as the purebreds; the dark facial fur and ears of a Siamese meshing with the tawny brown and darker stripes of a tabby. The guests milling around spared him no second glance. He went by Smoke there, because in their world, he was little more than a wisp, then gone. That was how he liked it.

Such disregard made The Lady noticing him all the more extraordinary.

The bar was the place to be. The samoyed bartender was a distraction in every sense of the word, with her paws flying like doves mixing and pouring, while her cheerful voice and icy eyes added scenery to everything. Waiters would drift through to drop off empty wine glasses and restock while trading gossip they'd overheard. There Smoke could ply useful hearsay amid casual flirtation and the occasional phone number.

As with all felines he was incapable of tasting anything sugary or sweet, which narrowed down the drinks worth his time. Lifting the glass to his lips, Smoke took a sip of a tart red wine, the evening's poison of choice.

A chance glance up the large stairway leading to the upper floor stopped his heart.



A vision of contrasts ascended the staircase's zenith. Among the wisps of a backless ebon dress glided the slender body of a mustelid of some kind, pale as snow with a tail dipped in ink. Long snowy arms eased from beneath a dark shawl.

Hair cinched in a bun held closed by chopsticks, while the lissome curls of her black bangs softened the harsh angles of her face. Her profile was visible as she half turned, placing an empty glass on the serving tray of a passing waiter.

At that point the feline would have looked away, but The Lady's eyes met his and seized him by his breath. Black as an oil slick with the same promise to sparkle under the right light, the

mystery of her eyes lurked beneath a dark mist of kohl-heavy lashes. From across the room she seemed to reach inside of him and caress the heart that had climbed into his throat. A smile painted the hue of frozen mulberries quirked in cunning amusement before, with the utmost poise of a queen at court, she lifted her chin and turned to drift out of sight, the last glimpse of her a tail wafting like some wind-caught steamer.

Dully he was aware of a numb ache in his mouth. Having forgotten to swallow the mouthful of wine, the alcohol had sat and stewed inside his maw. With a gulp Smoke sat the glass aside and walked forwards like he was snared in a dream.

He must find the noirish temptress.

Not for simple lust. Such a creature as The Lady, while beautiful, was no mere conduit for sex. The mystery that clung to her like dew on flowers had left him parched. He yearned to hear her voice, to see her up close, to know why she had looked at him so earnestly. Had she seen through his mere guise? Or was she who he had come for? Feline curiosity propelled him forward.

Moving through the crowd of milling debutantes and capitalist-princes proved time consuming, to the point that as he sprinted to the top of the stare, she was gone.

A moment's frustration bolted up his spine before he glanced around. Jogging left, he peered down a hallway that dead ended. Right took him through a hallway decked in artwork and fine architecture, opening into an antechamber with a piano, a player, and a pocket of party-goers. She was not there.

Past the conversationalists a door opened up into a wide lounge. Scanning the crowd he spotted the darting slink of a black-tipped tail wind around the corner of the door opposite him. He ducked between chairs and around guests. And right over the rear appendage of a stately ringtail.



The resulting altercation cost him precious time. No matter the displayed anxious urgency in his demeanor his victim was indignant and incensed, drawing his date into the matter. By the time the transgression had been assuaged, he was in full flight from the room, although this time with much more care in his path.

Rounding the corner, he found himself looking over the railing of the upper floor along a hallway that stretched out before him. There he caught the glimpse of his quarry, the white creature with her dark dress gliding into a doorway. He found the stairs and took two at a time, sprinting down the hall into the room beyond.

And stopped dead.

His sudden, breathless entry drew most eyes in the room, including those of a snowy cat in a black gown.

With bared teeth he turned back into the hall. At the very least the doppelganger had no black-tipped tail, so his quarry must have come this way. None of the rooms down the hall to the stair bore fruit.

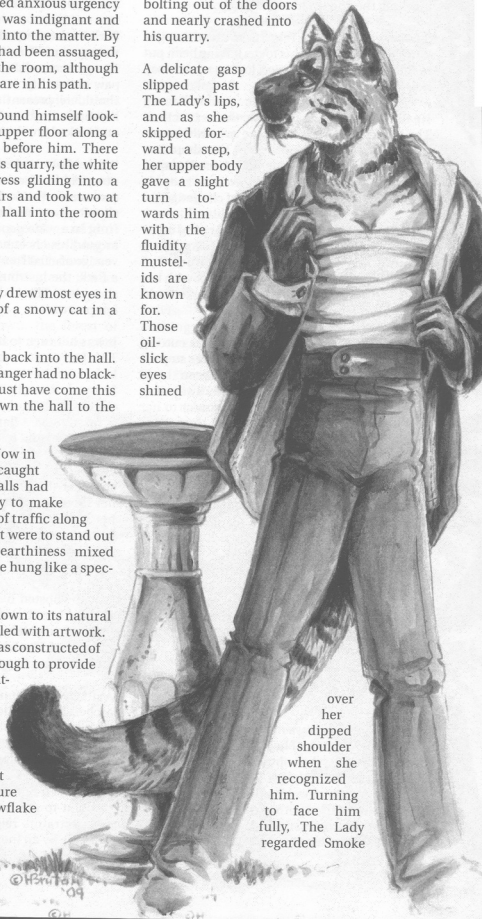
Back up the stair he went. Now in less of a hurry, the feline caught a scent. While the other halls had been traversed by too many to make one scent stick out, the lack of traffic along this hall allowed the few that were to stand out more distinctly. Mustelid earthiness mixed with copper and honeysuckle hung like a specter. This was the way.

He followed the upper hall down to its natural conclusion: a sitting room filled with artwork. Except that one of the walls was constructed of frosted glass, translucent enough to provide a misty field to spy the floating black and white femme fatale, her black-tipped tail swaying serpentine behind her. The Lady drifted forth and, opening a set of double doors, glided into the night beyond. The ivory creature was swallowed up like a snowflake fallen onto the sea.

The pursuer sped past the glass, bolting out of the doors and nearly crashed into his quarry.

A delicate gasp slipped past The Lady's lips, and as she skipped forward a step, her upper body gave a slight turn towards him with the fluidity mustelids are known for. Those oil-slick eyes shined

over  
her  
dipped  
shoulder  
when she  
recognized  
him. Turning  
to face him  
fully, The Lady  
regarded Smoke



with a perked ear and an expectant smirk quirked the edge of her muzzle.

Smoke was forced to relearn to breathe regularly. With so much of his focus having been put to finding her, the feline was lost on what to say now that he had caught her.

He did not have long to decide the next action; The Lady forced his hand. The mustelid began to step back at a steady pace, her shoulders weaving in a hypnotic sway while her tail played counter. Lifting her head, the woman met his eyes with a much stronger look of challenge.

Something stirred inside of him. Among other things, it was his job to pick up cues and hunt things down. In a way it was his nature. The literal chase had primed him, and now with her daring him to come get her, he accepted and prowled after her.

Smoke's darting steps were intent on cutting off her retreat, to circle around her, step in close. Yet she kept the distance between them, dancing back and weaving her body away, that streamer of a tail always acting counter to her motions. This new leg of the chase brought excited breaths to Smoke, who flared his nostrils, drinking in the perfume-spiked air.

The courtship of bodies led them off the stairs, upon the walk, and into the gardens surrounding the gala's entrance, cordoned off by immaculate hedges. Their dance mirrored the artful flow of violins and woodwinds filtering into the garden from some hidden speaker.

As The Lady circled a bird bath, Smoke lunged forth with a hand. He caught her just as the ermine slid away.

The shoulder strap to her dress remained within his grasp.

Because her gown was backless and the front was split to the top of her stomach, the sudden yank only drew her shoulder and arm from beneath the strap. Half of The Lady's chest was exposed. Yet there was no breast there; mustelids are rarely gifted with svelte curves, but even the most androgynous of females have some illusion. Here, there was nothing but slender,

smooth torso, coated in ivory fur. The Lady had turned out to be a lord.

Both of them stood in silence. Then The Lady shrugged off the remaining strap of her dress. The garment slid down to her waist, held by a paw on her hip saucily, while she squared her shoulders, presenting the slender, toned line of her masculine chest. She then lifted her muzzle and looked Smoke in the eye.

While shock rode on Smoke's features, he did not yield to The Lady's challenge. He had his own secret. Feline fingers swept down his shirt, slipping buttons free, before he could part the front in a wide gap. Beneath, bandages wound around his chest bound his breasts, giving the vestige of a flat front. His hair was released with a flick, the lustrous curtain tumbling past his shoulders. The Lady received a regal mimic of her posture.

It was her turn to be gripped in surprise. Then The Lady's dark eyes, shaded by a lattice of lashes, shined with intrigue. She slinked forward, dress in disarray ignored as an arm wafted forth, the backs of her fingers smoothing across Smoke's flank. With that simple graze, she swayed and touched her gaze to his.

Taking the cue, Smoke stepped to the side, shoulder dipping, and draped an arm across her shoulders. The Lady moved in concert with his gliding form. Their dance continued as before, except their fronts mingled much like each breath, barely held, and ruffling fur as it came.

Smoke ghosted his fingertips from the beginning of her throat to the highest crest of her cheek. So delicate the gesture, he only brushed the tips of The Lady's fur, like some midnight breeze across her pelt.

A silken churr rippled from The Lady's lips. She arched her muzzle and nuzzled the air beside and beneath Smoke's maw, not so much making contact as allowing their whiskers to mesh. The vibrant tingle of the contact was electric.

Below, their hips and tails wove a sensual counterpoint to the two-step circling of their feet. The restraints reigning in their passion were unmade by an inevitable kiss.

The Lady's muzzle pushed in, laying into Smoke's lips as she rolled her maw in a tight circle. He took the barrage of his mouth in earnest while his tongue scored a rasping retort over, then past mulberry painted lips. She parted her mouth to accept him with a groan.

While lips mouths married unbridled, their bodies continued the vestige of a coquettish affection.

The flirtation of flesh, however, spiraled further away from seductive suggestion by the breath. It broke into a desperate symphony of touches; paws smoothing and swimming up flanks made bare by hasty motions, pressing and gliding of stomachs and thighs, and the twining of tails. Soon they were a tangle of limbs and motion, making music there in the grass. Smoke straddled The Lady.

She dipped her muzzle down, the forest of lashes not able to hide the longing, calling gaze presented to him.

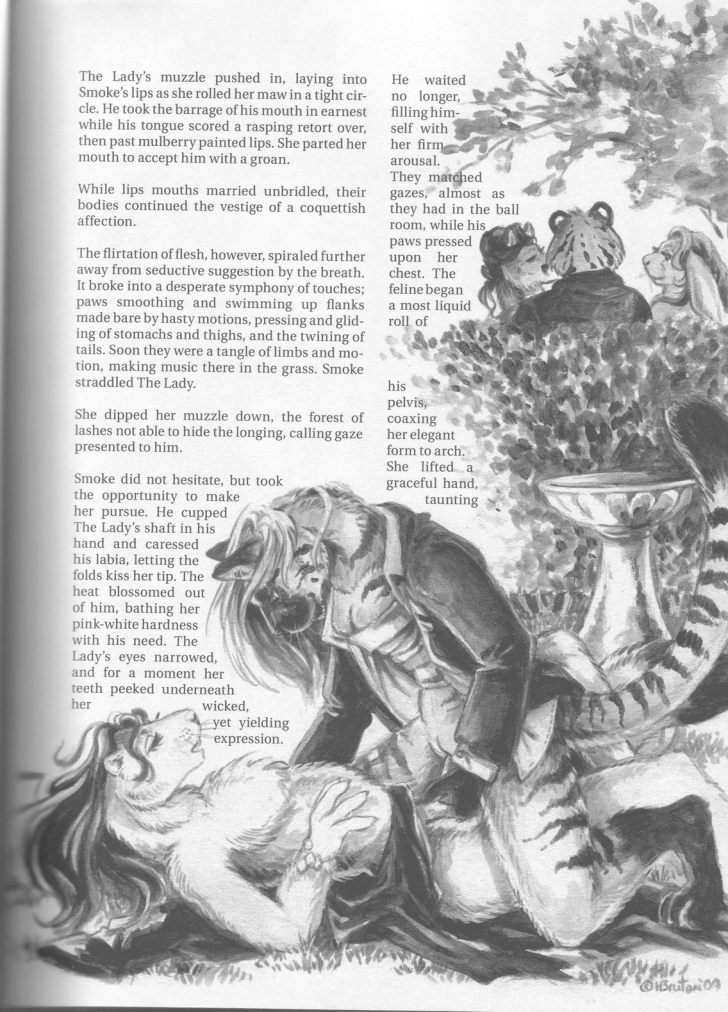
Smoke did not hesitate, but took the opportunity to make her pursue. He cupped The Lady's shaft in his hand and caressed his labia, letting the folds kiss her tip. The heat blossomed out of him, bathing her pink-white hardness with his need. The Lady's eyes narrowed, and for a moment her teeth peeked underneath her

wicked,  
yet yielding  
expression.

He waited no longer, filling himself with her firm arousal.

They matched gazes, almost as they had in the ball room, while his paws pressed upon her chest. The feline began a most liquid roll of

his  
pelvis,  
coaxing  
her elegant  
form to arch.  
She lifted a  
graceful hand,  
taunting



his wrapped breasts with wicked manipulation.

Leaning down, the feline mingled his breath with the mustelid queen, the fire of their lips surpassed only by the sizzle of their loins' desperate friction, drawing noises from either end. It was a music born of two becoming one.

Voices meshing with the slices of violin music, like that elegant caterwauling, and their need soon reached for the crescendo. Their bodies cinched and twanged to a similar draw down, and the beautiful build petered out to beauty unlived.

It was some time before their hearts and breath were not frantic.

In languid luxury, Smoke lifted his weight from her. The Lady stretched out beneath him, satiated and smug. Their hands gave lazy caresses, both to smooth down fur that had been tussled out of place, and to relay the affection neither could speak. Close muzzles meant shared breathes, and the occasional mingling of whiskers.

Beyond the hedges, guests had begun to filter out of the gala.

They were at the moment protected from the prying eyes of gawkers, but little time remained before they would be exposed.

While their eyes remained touching, the feline reached out, his expert fingers collecting the purse she had discarded in lustful haste. Slipping inside the miniscule bag, his fingers slid across a smooth, circular envelope. It was smaller than his palm, weighing less than a breath; the sliver of a flash drive inside like air inside the beige tube.

The Lady had been the one he had come for. But he had found much more with her. They both knew the meeting would be their first and last; repeated rendezvous with operatives is a dangerous, leaving a trail and a chink in one's otherwise slippery routine.

With the communication in hand, he rose to his feet. Blowing her a kiss, Smoke left his wintry queen in the grass, the taste of her mulberry kiss still on his lips.



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# DOUBLE REWARD

by TaniDaReal

OLF-1







MMM...  
YOUR PAWS FEEL  
LIKE VELVET...



AND EVEN  
MORE SO...



AND NO PEEKING!  
BE A GOOD  
BOY, OK?



HM HM!

NOW, LET'S  
FIRST GET RID  
OF THESE...



...AND LAY  
DOWN ON  
THE BED..





AND DON'T  
FORGET THE RULES -  
KEEP YOUR PAWS  
AT BAY. JUST RELAX!

"MRRRF"

"WHIMPER"  
SO GOOD...

AND THAT'S JUST  
THE FOREPLAY...

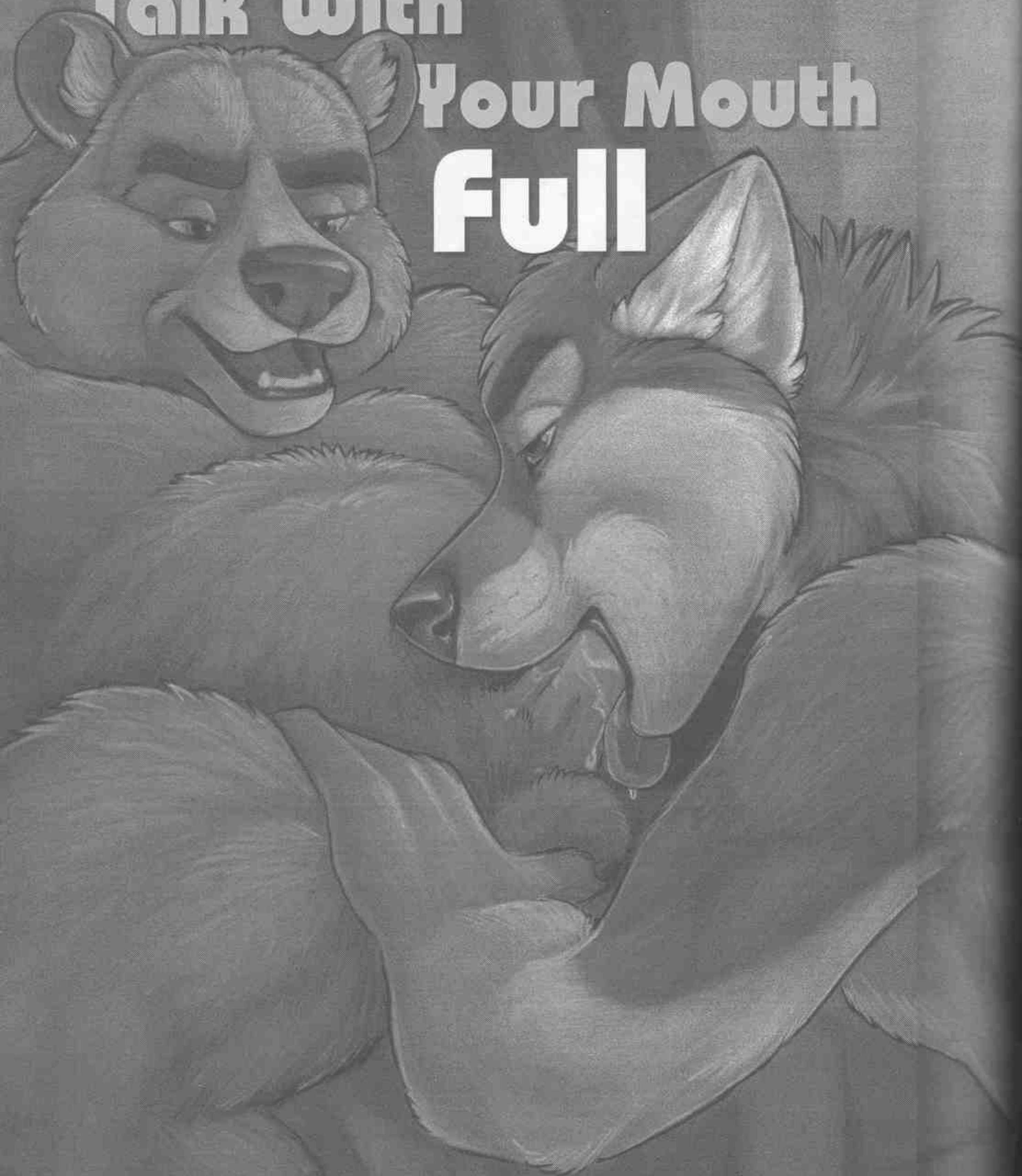
\*AWWWWWW!\*







# Talk With Your Mouth Full



by Keyll Gold



**IT** wasn't the longest cock Vandy had ever put in his mouth, but it might have been the thickest. He wondered as he adjusted his muzzle around it if he'd picked up a bear because of some subconscious desire to experience something as different from a fox as he could get. It wasn't just the width, either. This thing had more knobs and ridges on it than the toy Zach had bought at the Folsom Street Fair.

illustrated by Chibi-Marrow





Maybe this was one of those guys who liked teeth. Usually those guys were more into leather and stuff, and Floyd was a Dockers and pinot guy. His bedroom had tasteful landscapes and some impressionist piece on the walls, even though his bedsheets didn't match the pillowcases. Vandy tried the teeth anyway, a light grazing as he slid his muzzle off the shaft. Nothing.

The bear shifted on the bed as Vandy rubbed with his tongue, moving his muzzle very slightly at first. The sour taste of the bear made him almost quit right there; whether the guy needed to shower or was just always that way, it wasn't Vandy's cup of sweaty tea. That was something else he and Zach had in common: a canid sense of smell that drove them both to stay clean and nice-smelling as much as possible. Even Zach's vulpine musk wasn't as bad as this, but if Vandy were going to be single again, he'd have to put up with this kind of thing. So he exhaled, drew his muzzle back, and focused on the excitement of being with someone new for the first time in six months.

He had one paw around the base—almost all the way around—and the other on his unzipped pants. His sheath, bobbing in the open air, was losing its hardness fast. The bear, whose name he was pretty sure was Floyd (the bar had been pretty loud), had started out sitting on the bed while Vandy knelt on the floor, and was now reclining on his elbows. He didn't seem to be reacting much to anything Vandy did, but he wasn't stopping things, either. So Vandy kept going, taking it as a personal challenge now to get some kind of reaction out of him.

He tried again, this time squeezing the base as he did. Floyd exhaled, but that was it. Vandy let the paw holding the base down to cup the bear's sac, something which had always gotten a gasp or a moan out of Zach. He couldn't quite fit the whole heavy sac in his paw, but he got most of it and pressed his lips around the thick shaft. No reaction.

Settle down, he told himself. You wanted to try something new. Roll with it.

But good gracious, if he didn't get some kind of validation soon, blow job etiquette be damned, he was going to ask if the guy had fallen asleep. His paw shifted on his thigh, resting on the hard outline of his phone in his pocket. Instantly, he had a terrible, naughty thought. He tried to focus on wrapping his lips around the bear's cock, feeling all the little ridges and exploring them with his tongue, but he couldn't chase the idea. He'd always said he could suck dick in his sleep, hadn't he? Would the bear even notice? He'd put on some wailing pretentious Europop that he probably thought was romantic, so any small sounds wouldn't be heard. Probably.

His paw was already working at getting the phone out. Zach would have gotten a real kick

out of this. Vandy turned the phone to vibrate, but his paw hesitated over the keys. He turned his muzzle to the side, trying a new angle. Who would he actually text?

Floyd actually made a noise, some grunt of enjoyment or boredom or hell, maybe nostalgia for all Vandy knew. The only thing he knew for sure was that it wasn't a grunt of orgasm, because the only liquid in his muzzle was his own saliva. God, this was going to be one of those blow jobs where he couldn't talk properly the next day. He put all the suction into it he could, worked his tongue around the bear's member, and fondled and rubbed with his fingers, which would've had Zach arched on his back squealing and shooting fox spunk in seconds.

Floyd shifted his hips and said, "Mm."

Vandy flipped his phone open. He couldn't really text Zach, could he? They'd promised to remain friends, sure. Of course, for a top, Zach was kind of bottomy, so who knew if he meant it. Well, Vandy would test that. Who else but a good friend could you text in the middle of sucking off a one-night stand? Because unless Floyd turned out to be some kind of freaky mutant who became interesting or rich after orgasm, Vandy wasn't going to be sticking around even for the rest of this night.

He hit speed dial 2, scrolled down to the Send Message option from memory, then hit Enter twice to get to text entry mode. At that point he had to bring the phone out into view, so he rubbed the bear's knee with the back of his paw and turned his muzzle so that he could see the display. If Floyd noticed, he didn't react any more than he had to anything else since taking his clothes off.

Hey, Vandy wrote, and sent it.

Phone in one paw, he tightened the other and slurped up the bear's shaft and back down. At least now he mostly just tasted his own saliva. The novelty of having a different cock in his muzzle had lasted all of ten seconds.

His phone buzzed. Floyd, oblivious, didn't stir. He hadn't been this inert in the bar. Vandy wondered if he was falling asleep. He glanced at Zach's reply: Hey.

Slowly, while his muzzle worked, he typed, **Guess what Im doing.**

Just as he sent it, everything changed. Floyd let out a long moan and sank back onto the bed. "Good husky," he panted.

It just pissed Vandy off. "Good husky"? What the hell? He had a name. Like he was some kind of fucking pet or something? He'd specifically said he wasn't looking for that. At least, he'd meant to say it specifically.

His phone buzzed again. **Couldn't begin to.**

Same old passive-aggressive Zach. Vandy grinned around Floyd's oversized cock, adding some pumping action with his paw. **Sucking cock,** he typed with the other.

**Don't hurt your back,** Zach typed back less than six slurps later.

**Not mine,** Vandy typed. He grinned, anticipating the fox's reaction. Floyd was actually showing some life, gripping the sheets with his huge paws. Vandy rubbed his tongue along the bear's shaft, dripping saliva onto the matted brown fur.

His phone buzzed again. Without intending to, he'd let his paw drift too close to Floyd's knee. The bear grunted, and his knee twitched. It wasn't 'til he settled back down that Vandy glanced at the phone. **Seriously? Goofbutt.**

Vandy paused with his muzzle at Floyd's tip. Habit more than thought moved his tongue around it, as though the stop had been intentional. The affectionate nickname confirmed, in case he needed it, that he and Zach were still friends. Knowing that, he felt a stir of warmth in his chest not unlike the one he was trying to arouse in the groin of the somnolent Floyd.

The phone buzzed again before he could type anything else. "Unh," Floyd said, his hips lifting into Vandy's muzzle. Did that mean he was close? Vandy's mouth was sore, but hopefully this would be over soon. He looked at Zach's reply. **So why are you talking to me?**

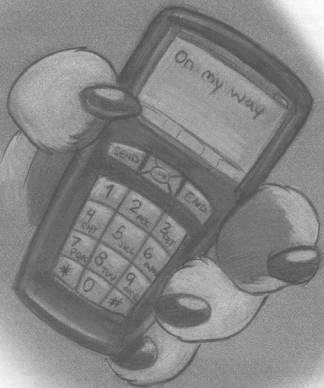
That was the question. Why was he texting Zach? To rub the fox's nose in it? No, he really didn't want to do that. He'd been genuinely happy, to the point of his tail wagging, when Zach'd replied to him. Happier, in fact, than he'd been ever since Floyd had said that thing in the bar about seeing his apartment (and if he were going to be honest with himself, that hadn't made him happy so much as excited in a there's-a-new-Keanu-Reeves-movie-out kind of way). The reasons he had marshaled for being in precisely this position scattered despite his attempts to call them together again.

Floyd grunted again. Vandy thought maybe he was getting close, but it was little more than a guess on his part. Of course, whether or not Floyd was close, it didn't matter. If this night had taught him anything (aside from patience), it had taught him that when you keep thinking about one guy with your lips wrapped around another, it means something. He typed slowly, *It's not \*your\* cock.*

Then he shoved the phone right up under Floyd's sac, rested both arms on the bear's massive thighs, and pumped the thick shaft into his muzzle, using all the tricks he knew. He dragged teeth along the hard, hot skin; he pulled up with his lips; he rubbed and flicked and played with his tongue. Floyd shuddered and right as Vandy's phone vibrated between his legs, he let out a loud growl. It was fortunate that he wasn't longer, because the jerk of his hips forced his full length into the husky's mouth. In the midst of gulping at the flood of seed against his tongue, Vandy glanced down at his phone.

*So swallow and come home.*

Home. This time, he couldn't stop his tail from wagging. Floyd lifted himself back up on his elbows and looked down his heaving chest.



"Wow," he said, peering at Vandy's paw. "Was that...was that your phone?"

"Mm-hmm." Vandy kept his muzzle down, licking up the dribbles from the bear's tip more out of habit and courtesy than desire.

"You made it go off? Pretty rad."

Who the fuck said "rad" any more? Vandy hit the preset message, *On my way*, sent it, and closed his phone.

"So, I'm kinda tired now, but you can stay here," Floyd said. "If you want."

Vandy grinned, shook his head, and let the bear slide out of his muzzle.



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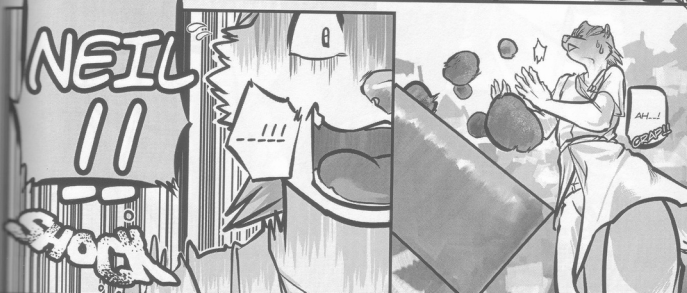
# SUGAR SWEET

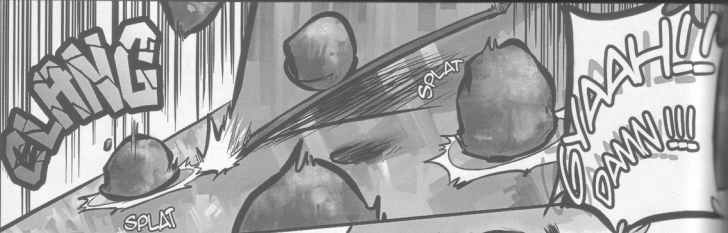
by YUKI



I REMEMBER...  
IT WAS A QUIET SUNDAY  
MORNING WHEN I DECIDED  
TO TAKE THE VERY FIRST  
STEP.







DROPPED ONE AGAIN? ----  
THAT'S THE FOURTH  
STACK OF SWEET  
BREAD FOR THIS  
WEEK...  
AND IT'S MONDAY.

ARE YOU SURE YOU  
DON'T NEED A  
BREAK, NEIL? YOU  
LOOK KINDA  
TIRED.

I SHOULD QUIT  
DREAMING AROUND....



I'M SORRY,  
BOSS..  
PLEASE JUST  
TAKE IT OFF  
MY WAGE FOR  
THIS MONTH..  
....I...I  
PROMISE IT WON'T  
HAPPEN  
A...

IT'S OKAY,  
DON'T WORRY..

GO HOME  
AND HAVE  
A REST FOR  
A DAY OR  
TWO,  
GOT IT?

BUT MY  
SHIFT  
ISN'T OVER  
YET, BOSS!

I STILL HAVE  
TO...

I SAID, IT'S  
OKAY. JUST  
BRING THE TRASH  
OUT AND GO  
RELAX FOR A  
WHILE..

RUSTLE

RUSTLE

GREAT...



I HOPE HE DOESN'T  
THINK THAT I HATE  
HIM.. MY WORDS  
SOUNDED A BIT  
HARSH..

IT'S  
AMAZINGLY  
SOFT.  
PERFECTLY  
SWEETENED..  
AND HE  
DOESN'T EVEN  
NEED TO PEEK  
AT THE  
RECIPES.

I'LL CLEAN UP  
THE MESS  
THE MEANWHILE



HE'S DOING  
A REALLY OUT-  
STANDING A JOB  
FOR A NEWBIE..  
THANKS TO HIM,  
THE BUSINESS IS  
RUNNING BETTER, AND  
MORE AND MORE PEOPLE  
COME TO VISIT OUR  
LITTLE BAKERY. I'M  
REALLY HAPPY  
I HAVE HIRED  
HIM BACK  
THEN.







YEAH... SOMEONE'S GONNA PAY THE HOSPITAL A LONG, LONG VISIT!

WE'LL  
LET YOU  
GO IF  
YOU DON'T  
DO ANY  
THING...

VINES!!

CRUSH

ERM, ERM.. YOU KNOW WHAT?  
YOU'RE THE BIG BOSS HERE,  
OKAY?

HEHEHE...HE...

COURAGE...  
ZERO

I SAY IT  
ONCE ONLY:-  
DARE YOU  
LAY A FINGER  
ON HIM AGAIN  
AND I'LL MAKE  
YOUR ASS  
KISS THE  
MOON!!

GOT IT  
PUNK?!

COULD IT  
BE...

BA-BUMP  
Ba-BUMP

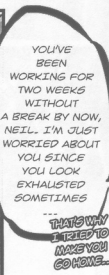
NOW GET  
OUTTA  
HERE. AT  
ONCE.  
OR YOU'RE  
BOTH  
GONNA ...

OKAY!  
OKAY!  
WE GOT IT!

REIKO!!

...THAT HE  
DOESN'T  
HATE ME?

ARE YOU  
ALRIGHT,  
NEIL? DID  
THEY HURT  
YOU?



YOU KNOW,  
I ONLY  
APPLIED  
FOR THE JOB  
HERE TO BE  
CLOSER TO  
YOU.

AHH...

AND EVEN  
THOUGH I'M  
ALL CLUMSY,  
YOU'VE KEPT  
ME BY YOUR  
SIDE HERE.

GO... I KEPT  
MY HOPES UP!

SHHH-  
QUIET  
NOW.

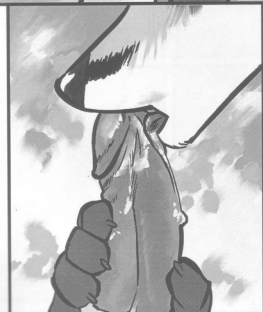
I'VE  
ALWAYS  
HAD MY EYES  
ON YOU, YOU  
KNOW? SINCE  
THE FIRST TIME  
I BOUGHT  
BREAD HERE  
FROM YOU.  
YOURS  
IS THE  
BEST !!

GRAB

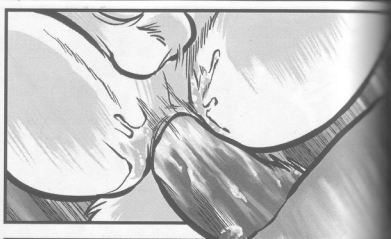
THUMP



TWITCH













HAH..  
--  
AHH..  
GOD..

I HOPE  
IT DIDN'T  
HURT.

JUST CONTROL  
OF MYSELF

NHH  
----!

I'M  
HAHH..  
FINE..  
----!

BREN-  
DAN..

SORRY  
FOR  
THE  
MESS  
--

CAN I  
HEAR  
IT  
AGAIN  
?

HM?  
OH, IT'D  
BE MY  
PLEA-  
SURE.

I LOVE  
YOU.

I LOVE  
YOU,  
NEIL.



YOU WERE THE MISSING INGREDIENT FOR MY  
SWEET BREAD. FOR A SWEET LIFE, FILLED WITH JOY.



THIS WAS THE FIRST  
CHAPTER OF OUR  
RELATIONSHIP.

I  
LOVE  
YOU.

AND I'M SURE  
THAT THERE'LL BE  
MANY MORE!



## Song of the Spouse

Yours is the face in which I confide  
Liar, sex god, hypocrite, and boyfriend  
All suffering, sorrow, and urge to hide.

Seeking no farewell, lusting loins collide  
Pressed close, meadows of passion twist and blend  
Yours is the face in which I confide.

Oh, tear my eyes, lift my tail, slide inside  
Your song is my harmony to transcend  
All suffering, sorrow, and urge to hide.

Rapture awaits, as our yelps coincide  
How far down this abyss will you descend?  
Yours is the face in which I confide.

The rivals for your love, my eyes provide  
Song of the spouse, the promise to an end  
All suffering, sorrow, and urge to hide.

Fighting the flame, inept to decide  
Our timeless beauty I fail to comprehend  
Yours is the face in which I confide  
All suffering, sorrow, and urge to hide.





poem and illustration by Fluke



# Learning to Live



by Khaz



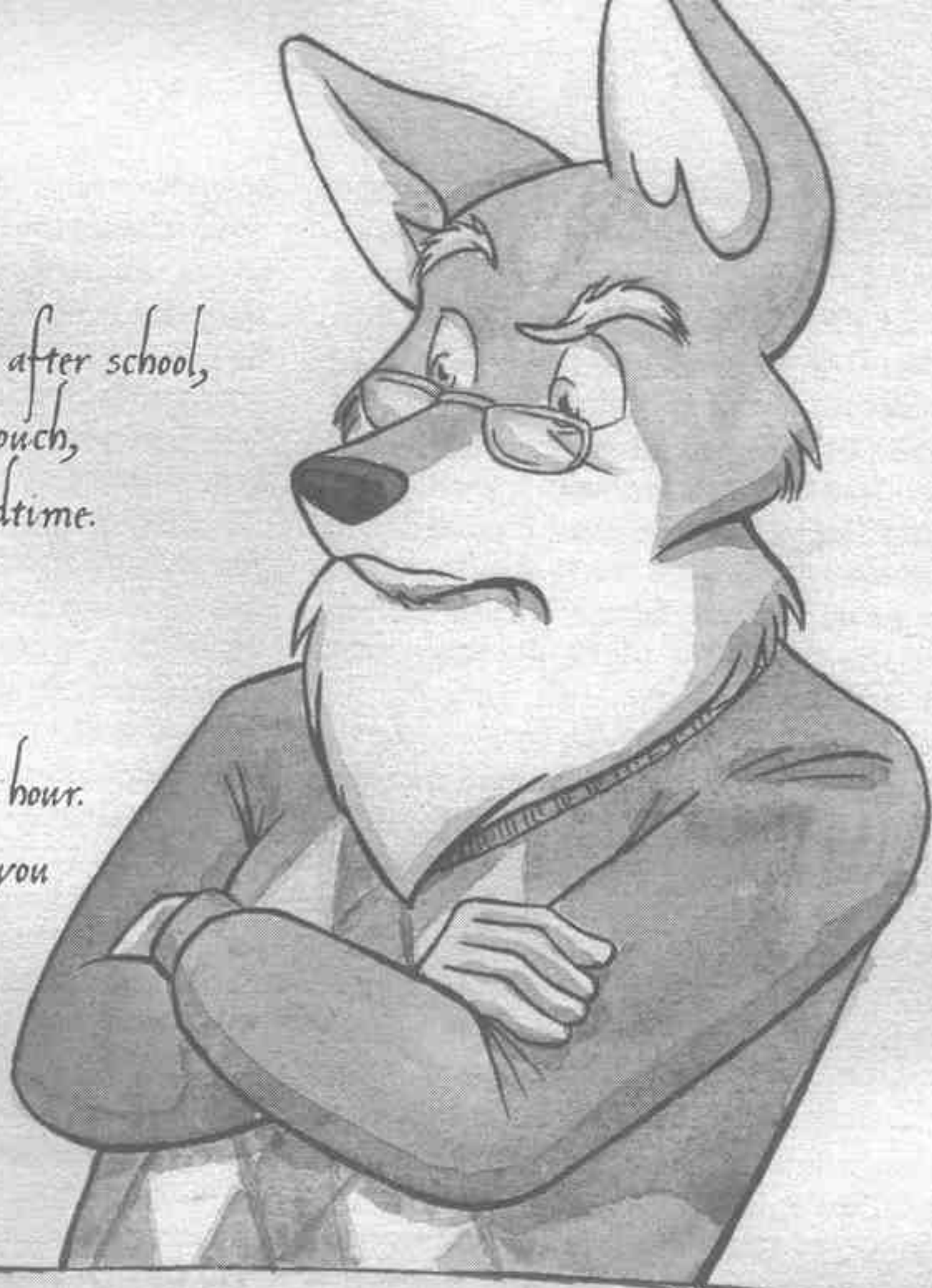
*Oh no you don't!*

*You come in here every day after school,  
sit your tail down on that couch,  
and you don't move until bedtime.*

*You need to get a life, son.*

*Go run around outside for an hour.  
You'll feel better, and then you  
can come back for dinner.*

*Now shut that thing off  
and get outside!*



*He walked away after saying that,  
the discussion clearly over.*

illustrated by Corgi

I sighed as I padded down the long lane towards my house, glad to be done with school for the day, but resigned to trudging the final leg of my journey towards warmth and comfort. The sun was strong, helping ward off the mild chill of October, but I was still cold enough to stick my paws in my pockets and shiver slightly. As nice as the sun's warmth was, my eyes hurt from its glare after having sat in dim classrooms all day. I wanted nothing more than to just get inside my house, close the door, and spend the rest of the night playing games or something.

For some lucky kids, the bus drove down the roads to their houses, dropping them off at their front doors, but not mine; no, I had to walk half a mile just to get home. The trees along the way may have been picturesque, but to me they only hid my final destination. Eventually, my house appeared from around the bend, and I broke into a jog as I turned up the gravel driveway. My spirits rose as the crunch of rock under my shoes announced the end of my journey. I swung the door open and slipped inside, taking a deep breath of the wonderful warm air and tossing my backpack onto the floor next to the door.

I could hear my parents talking about their respective days at work in the kitchen around the corner and decided not to interrupt them. Instead, I just kicked off my shoes, flopped over onto the couch, and turned on the TV. Stretching out a leg, I lamely reached for the stylish black box in the middle of the floor, flicking the "on" button with a claw and simultaneously grabbing one of the controllers off the table next to me. I'd been looking forward to shooting up some other wolves all day, and my patience was about to pay off.

"Oh no you don't," I heard my father's voice call from the other room, his heavy steps following to the doorway. Damn it all, he must have heard the sound from the loading screen. I half-rolled myself into a position where I could look up at him and folded my ears back a little, trying to appease the old grey wolf now towering over me.

"You come in here every day after school, sit your tail down on that couch, and you don't move until bedtime. You need to get a life,

son," he said in his best condescending tone. I whined a bit in response, my eyes flicking back to the TV screen now and then as I discretely navigated my way through the menu, hoping he'd just leave me be.

"Go run around outside for an hour," he suggested in a way that was clearly no suggestion. "You'll feel better, and then you can come back for dinner."

"Daaaad," I whimpered, "Come on. I'm an adult now! Can't I do what I want with my time?" I felt a bit sour after saying that, realizing I was over 18 years old and still being pushed around by my parents.

"Not living under my roof. Now shut that thing off and get outside." He walked away after saying that, the discussion clearly over.

I made a big point of groaning loudly as I got up, hoping for some last-minute pity, but to no avail. I shut everything back down again and made my way to the door. Jamming my shoes back on my feet and muttering under my breath, I swung the door open again and slammed it behind me. That brought some small satisfaction.

I stuck my paws back in my pockets and looked around, wondering where I should go for an hour. Or maybe only 50 minutes, if I could get away with it.

The sun was still up in the sky, though it was starting to fall to the west, and I wished for a moment I'd taken my jacket to go over my blue T-shirt and jeans. Thankful at least for my own coat of thick white fur, I started walking towards the woods behind my house, vaguely hoping I might run into a squirrel or some kind of wildlife.

*Damn him*, I thought to myself as I walked under the cover of the trees. *I don't deserve this. All I want is to come home from school and be done for the day.* I kicked at the light cover of crisp fallen leaves on the ground and sighed. This was going to be one boring hour.

I trod through the shade for a while, listening to the steady sound of leaves crushed beneath my paws, before stopping and leaning against a

particularly large tree. I folded my arms across my chest and vaguely thought that the woods might not have been the best choice, on account of the lack of warm sunlight. Mentally shrugging the thought aside I took a look around, hoping but not expecting to see something interesting.

Suddenly my ears perked up and I froze in place, listening intently. There was some kind of sound out there, coming from opposite the direction I'd come in. I could only just barely catch it through the soft noise of air in my ears, but it sounded like music.

I was very much confused at that, as I stood trying to follow the soft melody. These woods stretched on for quite a ways, and I wasn't expecting to find anyone out here. Curiosity getting the better of me, I tracked the source of the noise as best I could and started walking again. As soon as I did, the crunch of dead leaves under my shoes drowned out the faint trace of music, but after only a short way, I started to pick it up again.

At last, I could tell the source of the delightful music was only a few steps away. My heart was pounding in my chest with excitement and fear, wondering who could be out here. I started to move more quietly, sneaking up and hiding behind trees as best I could. The melody was beautiful as it rose and fell from just around a thick group of trees and bushes before me, so much so that I stopped for a moment just to listen. It was definitely some sort of flute, but what was being played on it was foreign, and yet hauntingly familiar.

I took a deep breath, trying to work up some courage. Slowly, I snuck out from behind the tree in front of me, and at last caught sight of the source of the mysterious sound. Sitting on the body of a fallen tree right in front of me was a small red fox boy, about my age, playing a smoothly carved wooden flute. And he was naked.

I stood there, somewhat surprised and not knowing whether to be amused, offended or embarrassed by his lack of clothing. Before I could even make up my mind, he opened his eyes and paused in his playing, only to immediately yelp and fall right over backwards.

I jumped at his reaction, lunging forwards on instinct to try to help, but the fox was already getting up on his own.

"Geez," he panted, one paw clutching at his heart dramatically while he looked me over. "You gave me quite a shock there. I've never seen anybody out here before." I was still somewhat dumbstruck, confused not just by this strange fox's nudity, but also the fact that I didn't think there were any foxes living in our neighborhood in the first place.

"Uh, sorry," I managed, standing awkwardly and making a focused effort not to look at any part of the stranger except his face. "I didn't mean to sneak up on you like that..."

"It's okay," he replied, brushing himself off and smiling a bit. "I usually can hear when something's coming. I just got a bit caught up in my music, I guess." He paused for a second to blow the dirt off his instrument before suddenly looking up and stepping forwards, a bit of a grin on his muzzle as he did. "Hi, my name's Mikya!"

"I'm Justin," I said, taking his extended paw in mine and giving it a weak shake. I pointed over my shoulder with my other paw. "I live just over that way. I don't go outside much, though, so I guess that's why I've never run into you out here before."


"You don't go outside much?" He echoed, sounding genuinely confused. "I'm only really indoors to eat and sleep. Too dull in there!" Mikya just stood there, grinning and looking at me. I was thinking of how to answer him, but I kept on getting distracted. My eyes kept on roaming down the soft white fur of his belly, reaching his completely exposed sheath before I tore them away.

"I, uhm..." I stammered, feeling blood rushing to my face.

"What's wrong?" he asked, looking even more confused.

"Well, uh," I began, trying to think of a graceful way to state my mind, before just giving up. "You're naked."





"Oh!"  
He  
looked  
down at  
himself,  
chuckling  
for a mo-  
ment. "Yeah,  
I forgot that  
most guys don't  
like to see other  
guys naked. I  
only really wear  
clothes when I  
go into town or  
something. I was  
just raised that  
way."

I was  
once  
again  
sort of dumbfounded, not having a clue what  
to say. I still kept my gaze mostly towards the  
ground, though. He wasn't ugly or anything,  
I just didn't feel comfortable looking at him. I  
was actually starting to feel awkward about  
this whole encounter, and idly wondered how  
much longer until I was welcome back home.

Mikya seemed to pick up on the tension in  
the silence and turned his head a bit, looking  
embarrassed. He moved his paws a little to  
strategically cover himself. "I'm sorry."


I blushed even more beneath my fur, but with a  
deep breath finally looked back up to meet his

eyes. "It's okay. I don't suppose there's anything  
you can do about it right now." I kicked at the  
ground idly for a moment, pondering what to  
say next. I really didn't want our conversation  
to end, as strange and somewhat intimidating  
as it was, since it was so very fascinating. I just  
didn't know how much longer I could handle  
it. I wasn't usually very good at being social  
anyways, and this was quite a bit more of a  
challenge than usual.

"Aren't you cold, though?" I ventured at last.

"Haha, nah!" Mikya giggled at that question for  
some reason. "My fur's more than enough to  
keep me warm in this weather. And it just feels  
so much better, to feel the air and everything,  
without any of that stuff to get in my way."

I'd really never considered being naked in that  
way before. I was still blushing, and very  
much thankful he couldn't tell I  
was. It wasn't really *that* cold out,  
when I thought about it.



"You could always join me,"  
the fox offered, leaning back  
against a tree, what appeared  
to be a nervous grin on his  
muzzle. "You might enjoy it."

"Uh, no thanks, I'll keep my  
clothes." I said, my face burning  
from the embarrassment of the  
mere idea. *Wow*, I thought to  
myself, *this has got to be the gay-  
est thing I have ever gotten myself  
involved in*. Once again I caught my  
eyes drifting down his remarkably fit body,  
and tore them away angrily. *I am not gay*.

Mikya shrugged, seeming more at ease now,  
and just grinned. "Suit yourself. So, what was  
that you were saying before about not getting  
outside much? I'm kinda curious."

"Well, there's nothing to do outside." I looked  
aside, trying to come up with a respectable  
excuse. I felt like I was being lectured by my  
parents all the sudden. "I've been everywhere  
around here before, and nothing's ever new.  
There's nothing you can do out here on your  
own." I mentally slapped myself for speaking  
the last sentence as soon as I said it, realizing I

had just offered myself up for more time spent with this fox that I may or may not want to commit to.

Mikya looked rather surprised and shook his head excitedly. "No, no, there's a ton to do out here! I can't believe you don't ever come out and see all of it. I'll show you a ton of cool stuff to do, just come with me!" He stood up again from leaning against the tree, moving as though to head off somewhere before I spoke up.

"I don't think I should be going anywhere today. I have to get back home, my parents are waiting..." I looked down again, knowing perfectly well my parents wouldn't mind me taking an extra hour or so outdoors. I was just feeling a bit overwhelmed by this whole meeting and needed some space to process it all. "I've gotta go."

Mikya looked very disappointed by my announcement, but he nodded anyways. "Well, maybe you can come back tomorrow, and I can show you a few things then?" He looked shy rather suddenly, paws folded behind his back. "I'll be right here this time tomorrow anyways, and I'll try to remember to wear some clothes if it'd make you more comfortable."

I nodded in agreement, looking over at him again. "I'll try to make it out tomorrow." I paused for a second, looking around at nothing in particular. "See ya." And with that, I turned and started walking back towards my house. I didn't look back once as I very briskly made my escape.

Once I was well out of his sight, I paused and leaned against a nearby tree, panting lightly and trying to understand what I'd just been through. I just so happened to bump into a naked fox in middle of nowhere and had already made arrangements to meet him again tomorrow. And for some reason, I found myself fascinated. I didn't want to admit it, but there was something appealing in the thought of just stripping naked and running around with this crazy fox. Something liberating.

Something was clearly wrong with my head.

I sighed quietly, resuming my walk back home, and looked at my watch. Eight minutes left in the hour. Close enough.

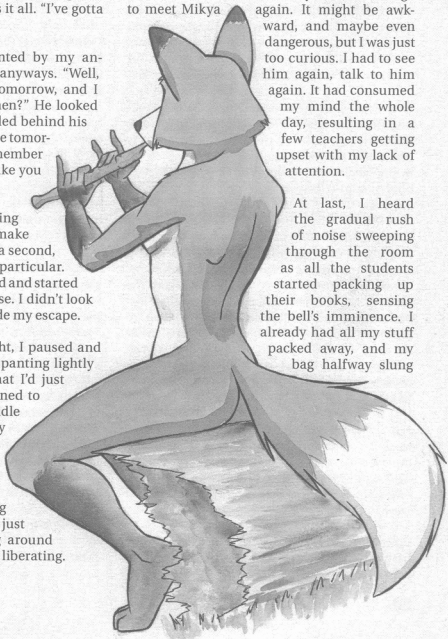


The clock couldn't have possibly moved any slower through my math class the next day. Basic calculus, and the teacher was trying for the third day in a row to make the rest of the class understand what a derivative was. I hadn't been paying attention the whole time. My mind was busy thinking about where I'd be going after school.

I'd decided earlier in the day that I would go to meet Mikya

again. It might be awkward, and maybe even dangerous, but I was just too curious. I had to see him again, talk to him again. It had consumed my mind the whole day, resulting in a few teachers getting upset with my lack of attention.

At last, I heard the gradual rush of noise sweeping through the room as all the students started packing up their books, sensing the bell's imminence. I already had all my stuff packed away, and my bag halfway slung





over my shoulder. I watched the clock for the last few seconds, the teacher finally finishing his long lecture. When the bell finally rang out, I jumped up and rushed out the door before anybody else. Showing up at the bus earlier wouldn't get me home any sooner, but I was impatient nonetheless.

The ride and short walk home went by in a blur. I both sat and walked in a daze, lost in my thoughts as I tried to play out how the second meeting would go. It seemed like only moments before I was opening the door to the house, and tossing my backpack inside.

"Hey guys," I shouted to my parents, who I could hear in the kitchen once again. "I'm gonna go walk around for a while outside. I'll be back in a couple hours or so, okay?" There was a short pause before my father's somewhat bewildered voice answered.

"Alright, just be back in time for dinner."

With that I shut the door and jogged straight off into the trees again. I couldn't have been more thankful my dad had decided not to ask any questions. My heart felt like it was pushing up in my neck with how nervous I felt, no matter how much I tried to assure myself this was no big deal.

It wasn't long before I started to hear that same floating melody again. My throat felt like it might seize up, but I kept walking all the same, appearing completely cool. Finally, I saw the same group of trees I had reached last time just before startling the fox, and slowly walked up around them. The music stopped before I made my way around, though, and I found myself looking at exactly what I had been expecting to see. Mikya stood before me once again, as naked as ever.

"Hi! I heard you coming this time," he said excitedly, walking over to meet me. He looked me over as he did so, and then suddenly caught himself in mid-step. There was a moment of awkward pause, before I finally said what we were both thinking.

"You didn't bring clothes." I almost laughed at his embarrassment, not feeling quite as awkward as last time.

"I'm really sorry," he whined, once again trying to cover himself a bit. My amusement died off rather quickly.

"It's alright." I shuffled in place a bit, weighing my options. I'd been thinking about this all day, and as nervous as I felt, I had long ago made up my mind. Without saying anything more, I kicked off my shoes and pulled my shirt up over my head. Mikya stood and watched. He didn't say anything either, but looked much happier with every passing second.

Now wearing nothing except my jeans and my boxers beneath them, I paused for a moment, suddenly having second thoughts. Mikya sensed my hesitation and grinned shyly.

"You don't have to..."

"No, it's okay," I said, taking a deep breath and trying to calm myself. This was something I wanted to do, and so I was going to do it. I didn't know *why* I wanted to, I just did. So at last, I unzipped my jeans, pulled both them and my boxers down together, and finally kicked them off with my shirt and shoes. A soft breeze blew through the trees, ruffling my fur in places I wasn't used to feeling wind. I shivered a little. It was a bit cold, but not unbearable. What was unbearable was the feeling of his eyes on me, but the worst part of the embarrassment was already over.

"Doesn't it feel better?" he asked me, almost giggling at the same time. I grinned a bit nervously and nodded. It was an incredibly exciting feeling, having only my fur to cover me. The wind was refreshing, and I was starting to understand why Mikya enjoyed it so much. I looked down at myself, and back at him, and very suddenly hoped with every ounce of my being that nothing provoked a reaction from my now exposed sheath.

"So," I mumbled, hoping for a bit of distraction. Luckily, Mikya had ideas of his own already. He padded over to me, and before I could wonder what he was up to, he thrust out his paw and pressed it to my chest. He leaned up to me, looking into my eyes with a big cute grin.

"You're it."

Once again, I was completely dumbfounded. While I was busy trying to comprehend how this turned into a game of tag, Mikya was already making his escape. I couldn't help but laugh as I sprang after him, completely forgetting my lack of clothing already.

Chasing after the fox proved to be much more of a challenge than I expected. He was smaller than me, but he was a lot more agile. Every time I thought I could reach out and grab his tail, he darted around a tree, leaving me to spin and slide off balance, sometimes even falling down. After only a couple minutes, I was panting heavily.

Finally, as Mikya spun around another tree, I slipped around the other side, catching him off guard and managing to hit my paw off his shoulder. Gasping with fatigue and relief, I immediately dashed off in the other direction. I only got away for a few seconds before I heard him gaining on me again, and I knew I wouldn't be able to escape. I felt like my heart was about to explode, and he wasn't even winded.

The inevitable caught up with me as Mikya took a flying leap and landed on my back. With a strangled yelp, I fell forwards, the fox clinging to me, and landed on my front with a thud. I didn't even move afterwards, just lying there underneath him, trying desperately to catch my breath.

"Got you," he said with a quiet chuckle, shifting just a bit on my back but not getting up. He made himself comfortable instead and nuzzled against my shoulder. There was a nagging thought in my mind that this sort of contact was completely inappropriate, but it was overwhelmed by the relief of rest and the warmth of his body pressing down on mine. It was a kind of comfort I'd never really felt before, and just for that moment, all thought and reason slipped away. I looked around a little, still panting slightly.

"It's so quiet out here," I whispered. We were on the edge of the forest, lying on some soft grass and looking out at a nice wide, open field. I wasn't entirely sure where we were, but I didn't see any houses or anybody walking around. It was a pretty beautiful sight.

"Mmhhh," Mikya hummed on top of me. I felt him start licking up the length of my ears, and my whole body shivered from the sensation. I'd never felt that before, though I couldn't deny this moment might as well have been taken straight out of my fantasies. Well, not exactly.

There was no helping it; my mind had started running again. This wasn't a lovely vixen lying on my back, grooming my fur, her soft, feminine paws running over my body. His scent was unmistakably male. His body was firm and muscled. And that's when I noticed something warm and stiff pressed against the small of my back.

"Hey..." I whined, my voice barely half-formed. In one instant, everything had turned sour, paradise crashed down into reality. His warm embrace was suddenly constricting me, restraining me, and in a desperate panic I threw him off me. I had to get out. I needed to get away from this whole situation.

"Aah!" Mikya yelped as he rolled off me, sounding just as he looked: scared and confused.

I didn't know what to say. I sprang to my feet and backed away a couple steps, just staring at the fox with wide eyes, painfully aware of our exposed bodies. I didn't know what to say to the shocked expression that stared back at me. I felt bad for hurting him, and worse for what he'd just done. I needed to get out of there.

"I'm sorry!" Mikya pleaded, covering his half-exposed shaft with his paws. He looked so small all the sudden, his ears laid back and his tail curled around himself. The sight tore at my heart.

"I..." I hesitated, instinct whipping my head from side to side as though someone might be watching. "I have to go."

And with that, I ran.

"Wait!" Mikya shouted after me, extending an arm as though he might reach out and hold me back, but it was no use.

I dashed straight to where I'd left my clothes and frantically wrenched my way into them. I looked over my shoulder and saw nothing but

the trees. My heart pounded in my chest as I watched, my paws shaking as I slipped my shoes back on. Silence.

I waited for a moment, trying to catch my breath. Mikya didn't follow me, and for that I was grateful. I turned back towards my house and started walking quickly, trying to calm my fluttering heart, trying to hold my paws still. The sheer excitement was hard for me to even understand. I kept replaying the scene again and again as I walked, the feelings still resonating through my body. The echoes of comfort, panic and thrill hit me again and again, leaving me with no resolution.

It didn't help that I noticed a definite bulge in my pants as I neared the edge of the trees once more, coming out towards my safe and familiar house. I shook my head and took a deep breath, silently assuring myself I wasn't gay, that it was just all the excitement.



I sighed and propped my muzzle up with my paws, eyes drifting in and out of focus through my math class. Product Rule and Chain Rule floated past my ears as I yawned, my mind twelve miles away.

It was hard for me to believe that it had only been a week since the incident. Every day seemed to weigh on me, and each morning I woke up feeling different. Every day my mind kept returning to the one question that wouldn't let go of me: "What now?"

I hadn't set foot inside the woods since then. Every night, after a moment's consideration and straining my ears to listen for the sound of a flute, I simply went inside and took up the routine I was used to. Of course, my heart wasn't really into jumping around with a rocket launcher, but it was the only thing I could think of to do. And while my paws jabbed at the controls, racking up kill after kill, my mind wandered in an odd sort of technological meditation.

At first I felt nothing but a numb shock to the whole situation. But over time, I started to wonder what it all meant. I couldn't deny that I'd really enjoyed that moment of peace, that

physical contact that was so absent from my life. Just thinking about Mikya's tongue on my ears still made me shiver, even as it wrenched my stomach with tense indecision. Of course it was wrong. Of course it was gay. But I wanted to feel it again, and curiosity made me wonder just what it was that had made me react the way I did. I panicked, but why? Because I can't allow myself to be gay. Why not?

The bell rang, and I jumped in place, barely realizing the entire class had slipped by while I pondered my unique little problem. I slipped out the door and made my way to the bus, my thoughts never missing a beat.

So, what, then? I had to go back, I couldn't just leave things as they were. I felt guilty just thinking about what Mikya must have been going through the whole week, never having any kind of closure. So what if he came onto me in a way I wasn't ready for? What could go wrong going out just to talk to him about it?

By the time I got home, I'd already made up my mind. Even so, I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd somehow talked myself into it, that I was just looking for an excuse to actually go.

I swung open the door and tossed my backpack inside. "Hey mom, hey dad, I'm going out for a walk again." They didn't even get a chance to answer before I closed the door behind me and started walking.

My ears perked up as I stepped into the shade of the trees, searching for the familiar sound of Mikya's music. My heart started to race in my chest again as I walked forward, memories made more real by the familiar surroundings, the thrill once again rushing through me. And at last, there it was.

I stopped walking for a moment, my stillness letting the music float clearly through to me. It was definitely the fox I was looking for; I'd heard that song a hundred times in my head since the day I first met him. Yet, this time, it was somehow different. It was the same melody, but there was no joy in it, not like last time. He played it slower, floating in and out of a minor key, sending a chill through me with the sound of it. I felt like his emotion was a part of my own just from listening.

I don't know why I did it, but I stopped right there and stripped all my clothes off. And then, taking a deep breath and trying to settle my nerves one last time, I continued forwards.

The music stopped as I came around the trees, and there was a moment of silence. I came out into view and saw Mikya sitting there, his ears laid back, looking just as he did when I last saw him.

"You came back." He looked down at the

ground.

"Yeah." I returned the gesture for a second, the awkward silence pulling down on me. "Look, I'm sorry about last time."

"No, I'm sorry." He looked up into my eyes. "I shouldn't have pushed you like that. I should have known you wouldn't be okay with it."

I walked over to Mikya and sat down beside him, putting my arm over his shoulder. Somehow, all the fear I'd held onto about this meeting just melted away in the sight of this poor, shy fox. I wanted to say something to make him feel better. I wanted to tell him what I really felt. I moved as if to speak, but had to force myself just to start talking.

"It's not that, Mikya." I paused, leaning against him slightly. To feel the warmth of his soft fur again brought back that blissful feeling of peace, even if it had only lasted a moment. In that moment, I would have done anything just to feel it again. "I just wasn't ready last time, you know?"

Mikya drew in a sharp breath, as though struggling to hold back tears. He looked up at me, and at last, I saw a bit of a smile come across his muzzle once again. "Really?"

I smiled back. "Really. I still want to hang out with you. I just got caught off guard, is all."

Mikya grinned and threw his arms around me, nuzzling into my shoulder.

I accepted the embrace happily. I nuzzled right back into him, his warmth shielding me from the chill of the wind. I sighed quietly, holding him, revelling in the feeling of another naked body pressed against my own. I almost thought I could stay right like that forever, and I would never want for more. That's when I felt his tongue lapping at my ears again.

"Ooohh..." I shivered in spite of myself, that wonderful thrill running down my spine. I swear I almost purred in my contentment, clinging tightly to Mikya, silently begging him not to stop.

Together we fell to the ground, myself lying on a bed of crisp autumn leaves, Mikya lying on top of me. I grinned as the fox rubbed his nose against my own affectionately, his paws resting on my chest, claws gently raking through my fur. I couldn't deny this was exactly what I'd dreamt of every moment for the last week. I didn't care what it meant anymore, I just wanted more of it.

All the while, Mikya just smiled down at me, paws kneading into my chest. He looked so beautiful, so perfect. I reached up a paw and caressed his cheek gently, as if to assure myself he was actually there. His smile only widened, and with a tilt of his head, he pressed his muzzle to mine.

Truth be told, I'd never been kissed before. I closed my eyes and felt our mouths lock together, his tongue playfully met my own, and for a moment, I stopped breathing. "Mmmmm..." I hummed, wrapping my arms around Mikya's back, holding us together for a moment. The sensation blotted everything else out of my consciousness. The forest, my school, my parents ceased to exist. There was only myself, and my fox.

As we finally parted, leaving me to recover my breath, I felt once again the warm, firm impression of Mikya's arousal pressing against my fur. I felt my own burying itself into his. There was no fear, there was no guilt. I pressed my body up against his, treasuring the feeling, gently thrusting upwards and shuddering at the sensation of my shaft running through his fur. My paws slid slowly down Mikya's back, coming to rest on either side of the fox's tail.

"You sure you're okay with this?" Mikya asked, looking down into my eyes.

I nodded. "Absolutely."

We both grinned, and I felt the fox's warm, soft paw reach down between my legs and take hold of me. I gasped as he began to stroke along my length, from the base of my sheath to the very tip. He sat up, resting on my legs as he worked both his paws on me, one slowly but firmly caressing my entire shaft, the other still clawing gently at my chest.

Through the haze of pleasure, I reached up my own paw, and curled it around Mikya's shaft. Together we pawed at each other, we whimpered and moaned. Mikya bent down over me, panting into my ear as his body twitched and shivered. I lost all sense of time as we lay there, gripped in the throes of pleasure, our bodies moving together as one. Even as the minutes dragged on like hours, every moment a flood of sensation too full to handle, the inevitable end finally caught up with us.

"Ah... Aaah!" Mikya whined and gasped, his hips thrust forward as he finally released, warmth flooding over my paws, spurting onto my chest. I nuzzled against him, still gripping his throbbing length tightly, holding him until his spasms finally softened to gentle thrusts

of his hips. Even as his eyes fluttered closed in the wave of glowing pleasure, his paw never stopped stroking me.

After a moment of recovery, Mikya redoubled his efforts. With a smirk, he squeezed his paw tighter on my throbbing shaft, his own orgasm making his soft pads slick. In moments I felt the familiar build of pleasure, and I started to whimper once more. It felt like I would explode any second, but the feeling just kept building, the fox's skilled paws driving me to heights of pleasure I'd never experienced before.

And then, with an instinctive thrust, it was over. I gasped for breath as I felt my seed spill across my chest, making more of a mess of my fur than it already was. I just lay there panting, the peak of orgasmic bliss fading into a wonderful glow of comfort and giddy relief. I wrapped my arms around Mikya once more and pulled him down to me, embracing him as I closed my eyes and rested. I felt his breathing in my ear, I felt his heart pounding against my chest, and in that moment I could not have been happier.



"I'm heading out now, guys," I called to my parents from the doorway, waiting for a response before stepping out. Tonight was different, and I was already rather anxious as to how things would go over. It had been over a month since I first met Mikya, and I'd since gotten around to telling my parents about this strange new friend of mine. I didn't mention the lack of clothing, and certainly not the fact that we'd been having sex almost every day for a month, but they were suspicious all the same. Today, I'd made arrangements to bring my friend home with me, to meet my parents. Seemed simple enough, but I couldn't shake the feeling something was wrong.

"Alright, see you soon," the answer came, and within a second I was already out the door. I padded swiftly out into the woods, shivering a bit at the cold. *Oh please let him have remembered to bring clothes*, I thought. I was sure he would remember this time; he knew how important this was to me.

I reached the same spot we'd been meeting in every day, and I was surprised not just at the



lack of the fox's familiar music, but at not finding him there at all. I looked around for a moment, but finally shrugged it off and sat down to wait. He would show up. I knew he would.

I kicked at the leaves on the ground while I waited, thinking about all the time we'd spent together. Even though it had only been a short while, Mikya really had changed my life in a profound way. I had barely touched a video game since I met him. I felt in such better shape; I felt happier, more motivated. And to boot, I had eventually been forced to accept the fact that I wasn't entirely straight. Every day I came to meet him was an adventure, because neither of us knew what we were going to do until we met. I'd never known there was so much to appreciate in a simple breath of air, or a pool of water. I sighed to myself, smiling a little. He'd made me appreciate being alive.

At last, I heard the rustle of someone approaching, and I hopped to my feet, my tail wagging a little of its own accord. Through the mess of trees and brush stepped a fully clothed Mikya, something I had never seen before. I grinned broadly, finding him remarkably handsome in a blue T-shirt and shorts.

"You remembered!" I exclaimed, practically jumping forward to catch him in a tight hug. He just laughed, holding me in return, before we let each other go, and simply stared into each other's eyes. He didn't look quite right, for some reason.

"Do we have to do this?" he asked, looking down at the ground.

"Well, yeah. If we don't, my parents won't let me come out and see you anymore."

Mikya sighed and nodded, looking sad.

"Come on, it won't be that bad," I said, hoping to reassure him. I started walking towards my house, and he moved with me, walking by my side. He never said another word the whole time. He just walked in silence, looking mildly upset. I wanted to try to comfort him, but I didn't know what to say.

Before long we arrived at the house, and I paused by the door for a moment, looking at

him. He looked back at me, staring deep into my eyes.

I opened the door slowly, stepped inside, and waited for Mikya to follow before closing it again. I already heard the sound of my parents padding out to meet us. I took a deep breath, just waiting where I was. *Here goes nothing...*

"Hi guys," I said as they came around the corner and stood in front of us. "This is Mikya."

I got nothing but blank stares in response.

"Where?"

I stood for a second, very much confused. Was this some kind of bizarre joke? Mikya was standing right next to me, mere inches away. I looked over at him, and then very specifically pointed at him.

"Right here."

My parents stared again for a moment, looking right through my friend, before all three of us started to look very much horrified.

"Justin," my mom said quietly. "There's nothing there."

There was a heavy silence afterward as I simply gaped at first my parents, then the fox next to me. This was incomprehensible. I turned to Mikya and grabbed his shoulder, shaking him.

"Say something!" I demanded. He just looked back at me, with those sad eyes of his, and didn't make a sound. Tears were already welling up in my eyes as I tried to understand what was going on, why my parents would refuse to acknowledge my friend. My father stepped forward and put a paw on my shoulder, and I immediately threw it off.

"Don't touch me!" I shouted, crying openly now. I couldn't stand another moment of this. I grabbed Mikya's wrist and pulled him with me as I ran for my room, my father shouting after us. I slammed the door as soon as I was inside and threw myself onto the bed, trying to stop myself from crying. I could hear them outside the door trying to reason with me, but I didn't answer.

"What's going on, Mikya?" I sniffed, looking up at him. "Talk to me!"

There was a long pause before he finally sat down next to me on my bed. He had the same sad, distant look on his muzzle as before, and he rested a paw on my shoulder.

"They're right, Justin," he said quietly. I looked up to him, tears still falling from my eyes. "I'm not really here."

"Then what are you?" I shouted, grabbing him by the shoulder again. "Some kind of ghost?"

"I'm just a part of you," he answered, looking into my eyes again. "You created me because you needed me, whether you knew it or not."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. All this time we'd spent together, there was never really anybody there. His body, his voice, his scent never really existed at all. I still couldn't even understand what that meant. I was just forced to accept it, because there was no other explanation. I sobbed as I buried my face in his chest, my arms wrapped around him. I felt one of his paws rubbing over my back, and I could smell his fur through the thin shirt he was wearing. I heard the faint sound of his heart beating from inside his chest. Mikya was the most real thing I'd ever felt. It didn't make any sense.

The two of us  
lay there  
on my  
bed

as I let myself cry for hours, clutching at this phantom fox I loved so dearly. My parents had probably called a doctor of some sort by now, but that was something I'd deal with later. By the time I'd finally managed to calm myself a little, it was already dark. I looked up at my friend, my lover, one more time.

"So what now?"

I didn't even need to hear an answer; I knew I couldn't continue things as they had been. One way or another, Mikya could not stay, the two of us could not be together forever.

"I don't care," I said at last, sniffing again and nuzzling against him. "Just hold me for tonight, Mikya. Please, just let me fall asleep with you one more time." I pressed my whole body against the soft, warm fox, holding him tight. He held me back, his paws rubbing through my fur, and his tail curled around me.

"I love you," I whined.

"I love you too, Justin."

Nothing more needed to be said. I lay there, curled tightly against him, still choking back tears long into the night. Even as I tried to stay awake, to cling to Mikya as we lay there together, sleep finally caught up with me.

I awoke the next morning as the sun was just breaking above the horizon, on my bed.

Alone.



I sat up as the memories of the previous night came flooding back to me, and I wrapped my arms around my legs, holding myself tightly. Just as I'd never felt so happy with Mikya, I'd never felt so alone as I did right then. The desperation from the night before was gone, though. I wasn't crying anymore. I just sat there, trying to finally come to terms with reality.

As broken as I was by the ordeal, I came to realize and understand something. Mikya had told me that I'd created him because I needed him. Whether or not that was true, one thing was for sure: He had changed my life for the better. I'd never learned to appreciate nature, to appreciate life itself, until he came along. I was more active, happier, and more confident than I'd ever been. These were lessons I had learned, and I committed myself to preserving them. Mikya always had been and always would be a part of me, and that knowledge felt like a flood of warmth in my heart. I might never see him again, but he would always be there.

In the next few days, there were of course a few appointments with doctors, which I tolerated because I had to. They eventually decided I had some form of schizophrenia and prescribed some pills for me to try. I managed to sneak my way out of actually swallowing them, though. It wasn't medicine I needed, just time.

I kept on going outside every night after school, once I'd managed to convince my parents I wasn't going to meet any more invisible friends. I still went to the same spot we always did, half-hoping to see him there, but I knew I never would. I didn't need him anymore, as much as my heart wanted to disagree. What I needed now was the real world.

One thing I did with my time alone was look up how to carve a flute. I fumbled around trying for a while, but eventually caved in and simply bought one. It wasn't quite like the one I remembered Mikya playing, but it was close enough. A few weeks more, and I learned to play it myself. It brought me a sense of peace and satisfaction to sit out where my old friend used to in the woods, and just play whatever my heart felt like. I often found myself playing the same tune that I used to hear back then.

One day, while I was sitting there, I heard a rustle heading my way through the trees. I stopped playing for a while, waiting and watching. My heart leapt in my chest, the last slim hope of seeing Mikya again poking through, but I could tell just by the rhythm of the footsteps that this was someone different. I stood to meet the stranger, and after a moment I was surprised to see a raccoon boy not much younger than myself step out from behind a tree, looking very much shy and scared. I smiled and stuck out a paw in his direction.

"Hi there. My name's Justin," I offered, waiting patiently as he, seeming embarrassed, stepped up to shake my paw.

"I'm Nathan," he said quietly. "My family just moved in over there, and I was looking around." I saw his gaze fall downwards from my eyes, and I very suddenly realized I'd taken my clothes off a while before. I usually did out here, and never counted on anybody finding me. I took a step back and covered myself with a paw, blushing beneath my fur.

"Sorry," I mumbled as I quickly snatched my pants and put them back on, noticing him watching as I did. He seemed a lot more comfortable afterwards, to my relief.

"I heard from my parents you guys were moving in," I said, smiling welcomingly. "I should have been prepared." We both chuckled a bit at that. After a while of more awkward silence, the coon pointed at the flute clutched in my paw.

"What was that music you were playing?"

I paused a moment, thinking to myself. I'd been playing the same melody that I used to hear from Mikya.

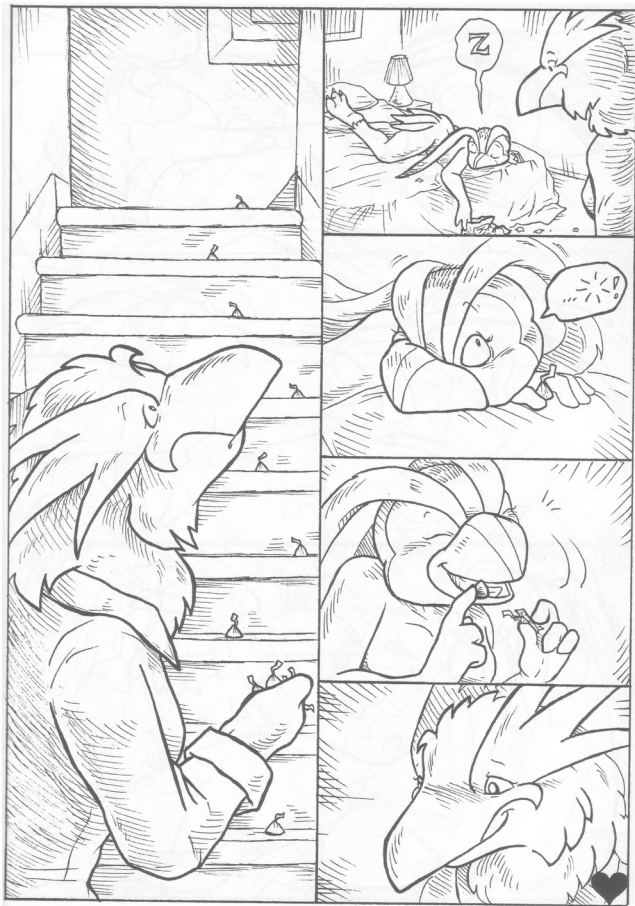
"You know," I said with a grin, "I'm not really sure."



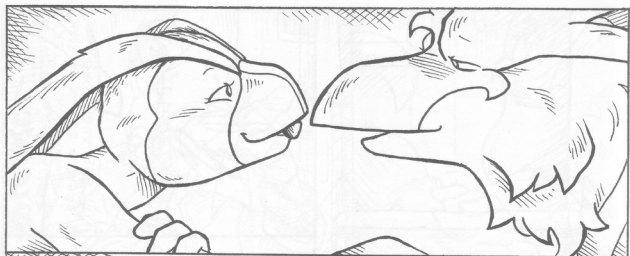
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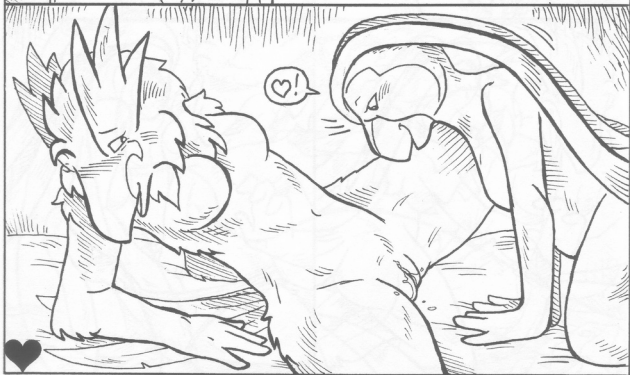


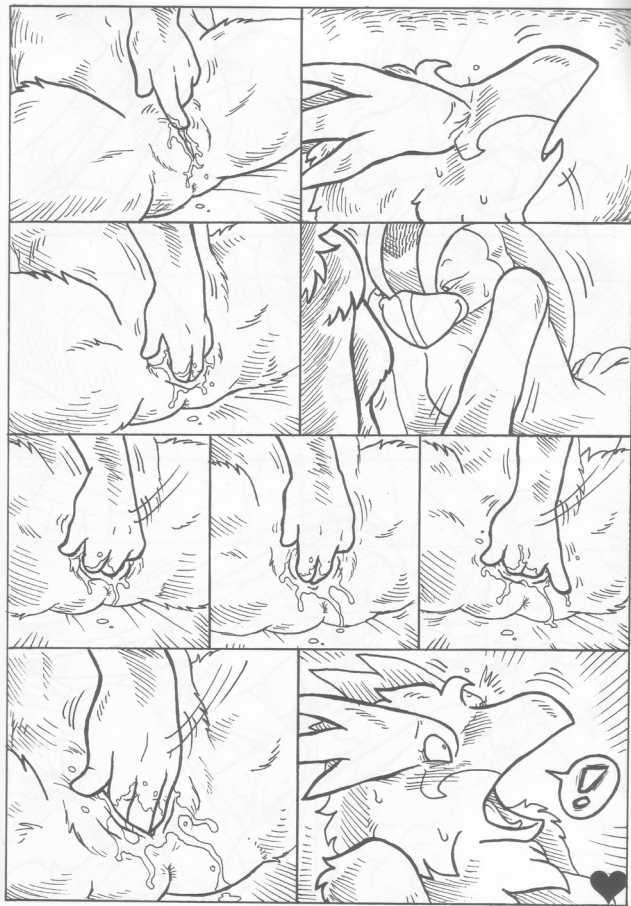


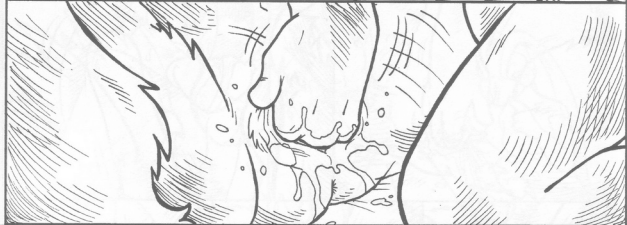




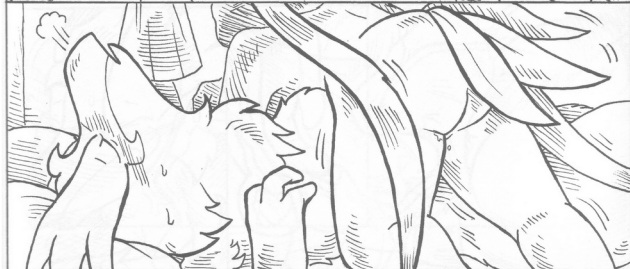
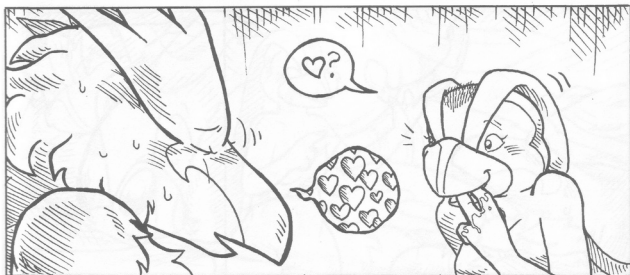






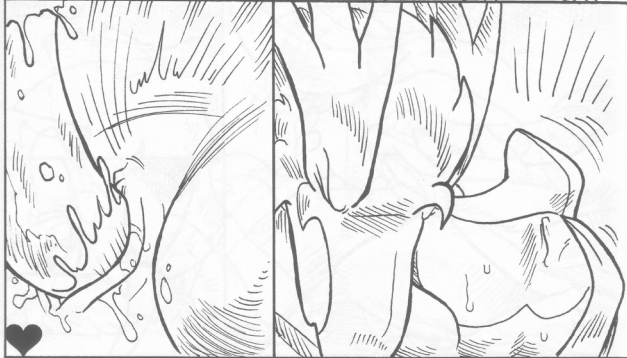
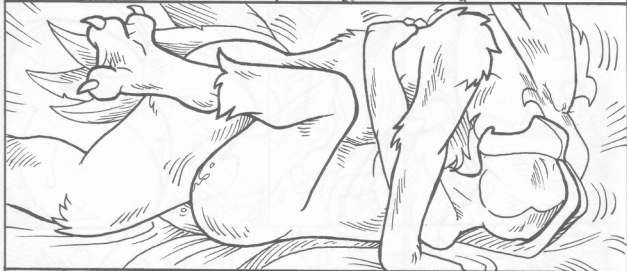
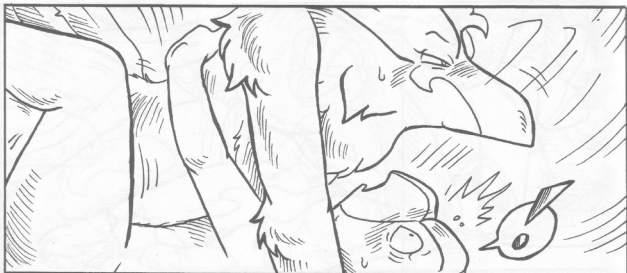


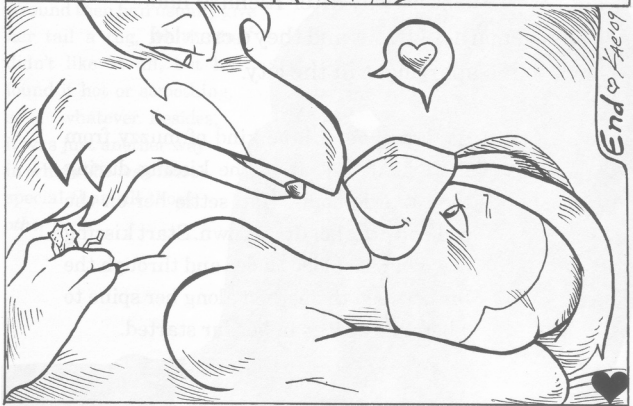
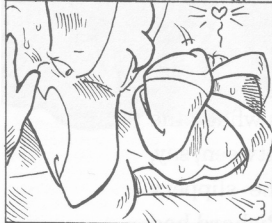












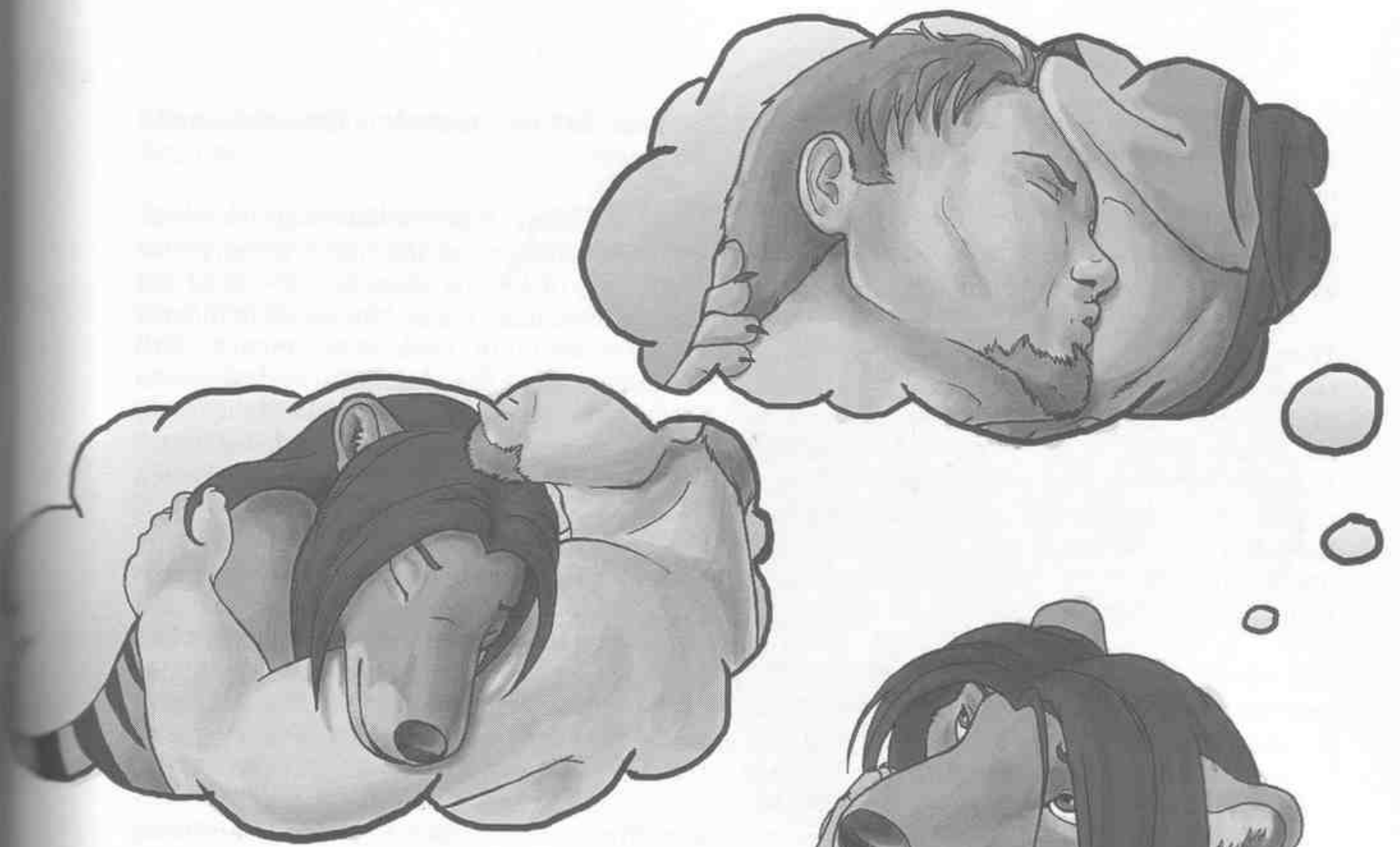
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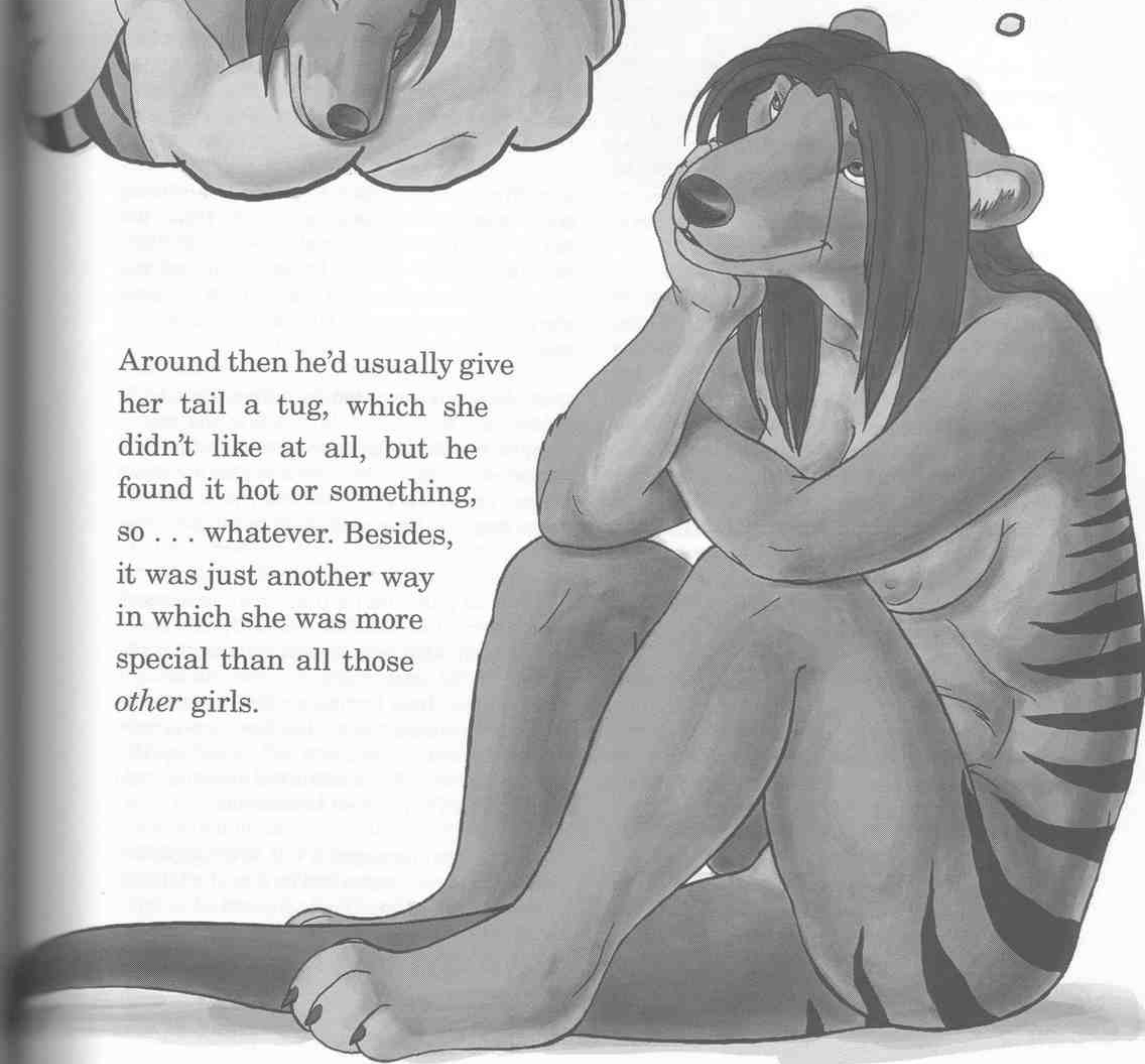
# Dick & Jane

**T**he slippery hours. That's what Jane called 'em. Somewhere between, say, Two AM and Four? The slippery hours. They'd start way after Richard had taken her on a night out and they'd crawled back to his apartment in the city.

At first she'd still be kind of muzzy from the drinks, and from the kissing during the cab ride home. He'd settle her on the bed and drag her dress down. Start kissing down her shoulder blades and through the fur between them, then along her spine to where the stripes in her fur started.



Around then he'd usually give her tail a tug, which she didn't like at all, but he found it hot or something, so . . . whatever. Besides, it was just another way in which she was more special than all those *other* girls.



Richard always groaned something about the feel of her fur on his skin, too. Described it in terms like velvet, which always made her feel really good because it was the kind of thing guys always said in romance movies when she was a kid. She could forgive the tail tugging.

Then more kissing... Richard was a good kisser. Okay. Maybe Jane didn't have the best frame of reference for this. She'd only had like, *three* boyfriends before this? Was it four? Did Jimmy Bragdon, her adoptive parents' neighbors' kid, count? She'd been like, fourteen, and him fifteen, and they were just, like... playing around one summer, so. No, no, Jimmy Bragdon did *not* count.

But what Jimmy had done, and what Richard hadn't, was kiss her on the mouth. Then Jimmy'd whined, "Oh God, oh God, that must be what kissing a dog's like, oh God, ew." And *then* Jimmy had thrown up afterward, so Jane had refused to play with Jimmy for the rest of that summer. Another very, very good reason why Jimmy didn't count.

Through college Jane had experienced a string of one night stands—which also did not count as boyfriends—and a lot of guys had difficulty kissing a furry on the mouth. So... okay, that was fine. Some guys didn't kiss furies on the mouth. Whatever.

But what if it was her breath? No, some of Jane's hundred and sixty or so sisters *did* get kissed on the mouth by their boyfriends, and since she and her sisters were all genetically engineered clones they probably had the same kind of breath. Some of her sisters didn't get kissed on the mouth either, though.

Some guys (well, human guys—furry guys were apparently "good kissers") had trouble with the muzzle. The majority of guys had problems with the whole gengineered animal thing, but Jane didn't bother trying to date them. Richard was fine with that, it was just her muzzle. Jane's muzzle was real long, that was all.

It was okay, because Jane *knew* Richard would come around on the issue eventually, and in the meantime they had their own kind of kissing which involved the curves of her ears and

her neck and the underside of her muzzle and... elsewhere.

Oooh, *elsewhere*. It sent a shiver up her spine. Just one of the reasons the slippery hours were good. Lots of kissing *elsewhere*. He liked her muzzle then, liked it a lot. She could fit most of his erect, uhmmm. *Dick*. In her mouth. With her tongue along the underside, and she could kinda twist her tongue, and... God, he *really* liked that. Which in turn made Jane feel good, because that meant *he* liked *her*. Loved her, even.

That was important. That was what made the slippery hours so good, starting sometime after the kissing had turned to sex, and the sex had become lazy bouts of dozing off and waking up and, uh. More sex. No, *making love*. Jane preferred the term "making love" over sex because that's basically what it was about. Love.

She loved Richard. He was the best boyfriend she'd ever had, although she hadn't had too many. A bunch of her sisters were on their dozenth boyfriend. Like, proper boyfriend, not one night stand. That was a little scary, because they were twenty-three. Then again, some were married.

Jane *desperately* wanted to marry Richard. It would be like a fairy tale. She was the pretty, unique, wonderful princess. He'd be the rich, handsome prince. *Christ*, he was rich. He was a lawyer, and just a little older than her—thirty—so he had all these gold digging bitches after him.

She was so much better than them, and *much* more special too. She didn't actually care about the money; what was important was that she loved him. Because after the slippery hours, she could put her nose next to his face and breathe him in. He smelled good, like boyfriends were meant to smell. She loved falling asleep like that, with the perfect smell of the man she loved on her and in her and all around her.

Last night had been good, but he'd tugged her tail kinda hard. Then when he'd pushed her up against the headboards she'd tweaked it, but it was okay because she got off and he got off and it was, overall, *magical*.

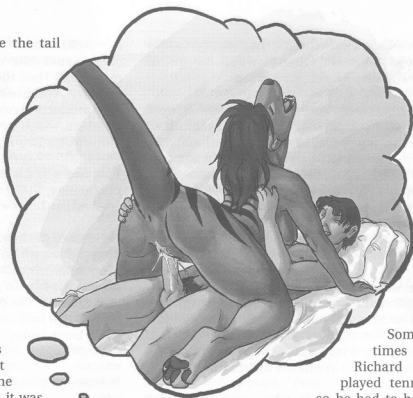
It was *real* easy to forgive the tail tugging.

But he'd rolled onto her tail in his sleep and woken her up before the usual time they'd roll out of bed on a weekend. Or rather, before the usual time they'd start rolling around in bed again on a weekend. So she slipped from his bed and made her way across the wide expanse of his apartment to his bathroom. He'd have some heat rub or something, right?

Jane pulled open Richard's mirrored bathroom cabinet and fumbled a little in the gloom. It was alright when it was dark and when it was light, but when it was neither, just mostly dark with light from the sunrise reflecting off the fittings, she couldn't see very well.

She didn't want to turn on the lights, so she just leaned up against the sink and started sniffing. She could smell his toothpaste, his aftershave, something stingy and electrical smelling that had to be his razor, her toothpaste, the toothpaste of that bitch he'd broken up with months ago but never thrown out. (Hadn't she thrown it out for him? In any case, she groped it out of the cupboard and dropped it into the bin by the sink. The smack as it hit the liner was exquisite.)

His cologne, her perfume she left here last week, something kind of medicinal. She carefully felt around until she found the bottle—a little plastic one—and opened it up. It sounded like tablets. She sniffed at it and put it back—maybe they were his birth control pills or something. (Why would he need birth control with her? It's not like people and furs could have babies. Furs and furs, even when they were really similar, couldn't. Their genes were too messed up. Maybe he was just finishing the bottle out of habit?)



Sometimes Richard played tennis, so he had to have something for bruises and sprains *somewhere*. She felt around the sink's shelf. Jostled his and her toothbrushes, caught them before they could fall, carefully put them back where they'd been on the marked part of the shelf so they could recharge. There was a lot of stuff on the shelf. Usually Richard liked to keep neat, but last night had been kind of wild and unscheduled—which suited Jane fine. She liked it that way.

She picked things up one by one, sniffed at the caps, opened them. His deodorant, a narrow vial of something that was kind of cloying at first but smelled really nice, then her lipstick, then a round thing she couldn't, uhm... Get the cap off.

She set it back down. Felt around for the narrow vial and held it up to her nose again.

It smelled way too strong at first, but when she pulled her nose away, it was, like. Really good. Boyfriend sex all night, falling in love, slippery hours good. *Good*. But the first part of the smell, uhm. That was kind of like the movie theatre smell.

When she was a kid and lived in the dorms, way back then, there had been movie night in the movie theatre. And they were always romantic

movies, about how the girl, the beautiful unique special girl, would fall in love with her special guy and they'd be happy forever.

She'd only been seven when the law changed and furs became people instead of engineered animals companies were going to sell, and then she'd been adopted and movie night stopped. She'd been confused because the movies her adoptive parents showed her didn't have any sex parts in them. There were... a *lot* of sex parts in movie night movies. Which was fine, you know? It looked nice and fun. Nothing wrong with sex.

That was why she ended up playing with Jimmy Bragdon that summer, since she thought it'd just be nice and fun. And it *was* nice and fun, until he'd turned out to be a jerk. It was great, and falling in love was great, and... why did the little vial smell like movie night at first?

And then afterwards, why... why did it smell like, like. Like being *in love*?

Jane shut the bathroom door. Got on the bathroom light, somehow. She squinted in the sudden brightness and turned over the little vial. It was like a little off-brand bottle of perfume, with a label printed on it. Like a medicine bottle. The cap even had a little eyedropper in it. She had to make her hands stop shaking to read the label, though.

And the label printed on it said "Pheromone TLC-zero-A-hash-hash-hash-hash".

And that wasn't good.

Oh fucking *God* that was not good.

She pushed the bathroom cupboard closed and stared at her reflection. She was pretty. *Pretty* Goddamn. Guys *loved* her she was so pretty. Green eyes, she gened her hair red, her fur was pretty tawny-yellow, her muzzle was long and sometimes people figured she was a canid or something. But she was *not* a canid.

She dragged at her upper lip and leaned closer to the mirror so she could see her gums. Where, when they made her, they'd printed her serial number with genedye.

Her serial number which started out TLC. See? Not a canid. She was a *thylacine*. A kind of marsupial. Then the serial number had a zero and an A, because she was part of the first and only production run. Then her four individual numbers, which were one two eight one. TLC-Zero-A-One-Two-Eight-One.

That was why it was *very* fucking not good that pheromone TLC-zero-A-hash-hash-hash smelled like boyfriends and sex and *Richard*.

No wonder she loved kissing his neck so much. That's, that's where you wore "perfume", right? No wonder he smelled so good. No wonder she'd been so Goddamn *glad* when he'd come up to talk to her at the company mixer. So fucking *thrilled* that he'd invited her home. (No *wonder* she'd been happy to forget about the bitch's toothpaste.)

"Oh God. Oh God."

She turned the light off. She went out into his room, and carefully picked up her clothes and things, and, he didn't wake up. She went back into the bathroom, and shut the door, and locked it, and sat on the toilet at an angle so her tail didn't jam up against the cistern, and.

And. Cried.

Cried? Why should she cry? She had her pretty dress that made her pretty because Richard bought it for her because he loved her, which she knew because he *fucking* told her she was *fucking beautiful*, right?

"Oh *God*."

Okay. So she was crying.

Jane hugged her pretty dress to herself and dragged her purse over. Got out her phone, went through the menu, and dialled.

The phone rang for a little while, and Jane wondered if anyone would pick up at first. God, why wasn't anyone picking up? Please, please just pick up...

"Oh Lord. Jane? It's early."



"Mommy?" She hadn't called her adoptive mother "Mommy" in about ten years.

Her mother's voice cracked. "Janey, oh God. What's wrong?"

"Mommy I need you to come downtown and pick me up from Richard's." Jane bit her lip and dragged her wrist across her wet cheek. "Now."



The coffee *stung*. And she was running out of shampoo, and her third-favorite pair of shoes (Richard had given her the first two favorite pairs) were scuffed. And she'd been late to work, and everything hurt. Everything was fucked up.

She shouldn't have come out to the coffee shop. She hadn't gone to movie night, which was the first Wednesday of every month downtown, because she knew the movie would just make her cry. Afterwards, though, there was coffee at a Tyrel's outlet, and that's where you went after movie night. So after movie night the outlet was full of customers, and they were all Jane's sisters.

"Break up?"

"Yeah," Jane whimpered. "Break up."

Maybe she hadn't wanted coffee. Maybe she'd just wanted a sister to talk to. Any sister, didn't matter which. Any of them would be good, they were her sisters. She didn't know all of them real well, just a few, but they were *her sisters*. They were all there for her.

Sure there were different shades of genedyed hair, running the gamut from red to blonde, but basically they were the same. They dressed similarly, had the same voice. So similar that sometimes boyfriends got confused.

Jane's sister settled down at the little table where Jane sat, set her heavy mug down.

"Jackie," the sister offered finally, holding out a hand.

Jane took it nervously and gave it the tiny little shake they'd been taught as kids.

There were a lot of Jackies. Well, Jacqueline and Jacqui and Jakki. All kinds of names, spelled different but nicknamed down into the same thing. There weren't really enough names to go around, for all hundred-and-sixty something of them. She didn't think she knew this sister very well.

Jackie tilted her head slightly, sweeping a hand back to catch her reddish hair and flick it over a shoulder. "You wanna talk about it, or just have someone to sit with?"

"How many boyfriends have you had?" Jane asked abruptly. "Not, like, uhm..."

"Not including the short one or two nights stuff?" Jackie rolled her eyes up to the ceiling in thought. "Nine. Unless we're including high school stuff and girls, then it's fifteen."

Jane blinked at tears. "Four," she whimpered out.

Jackie mouthed "oh" silently.

"I was so goddamn stupid."

Jackie's eyebrows twisted in concern. "Another woman?"

"No, well," Jane thought about the pills and the toothpaste. She swiped her fingers underneath her eyes. "I don't know. Probably. It didn't matter."

Jackie leaned over the table and dragged Jane's hand away from her face. Set it on the table and clasped both her hands over Jane's. "It's going to be okay, Sweetie. You've been dumped before, right?"

"No, I wasn't dumped, I kinda," Jane's voice hitched. Shame poured heat into her face, her ears. "Even with the first three I kind of. Uhm. Got bored, and, then, the next guy was just so exciting, and—"

"And this is the first time you got dumped? Oh God, sweetie." Jackie rubbed Jane's hand sharply, the warm contact reassuring. "It's okay, it's okay. There are other guys."

"I wasn't *dumped*," Jane squeaked.

"What happened?"

Jane stared at her sister. Green eyes, tawny yellow fur. It was like a mirror, except a real mirror would show just how *fucked* up Jane was. "I don't think I can fall in love again." Jane's voice was hollow.

Jackie sagged, her head falling to a sympathetic tilt. "Oh, come on. Of course you can."

"No. I can't. It's a lie. They made us and we don't actually love we just. We... just. Fuck. Like whores."

"Shhh, shhh, sweetie." Jackie leaned close with something approaching fear on her face. "What happened?"

Realization dragged like a razor along Jane's spine. "Oh God. You knew about it."

Jackie pulled her hands away, pulling her purse up for her phone. "You need to talk to Jennifer. She's been through this, you *really* need to talk to her. Let me get you her number."

"You *knew*. You *knew* and you didn't *tell* anyone," Jane shrieked.

At the other coffee tables, one by one faces lifted and looked in their direction.  
Some

had blonde hair. Some had red hair. A lot were in relationships, some serious, some not.

Did they know it was all, just... a lie? Did they already know and nobody *fucking* told her?

"Shh. You, you need to calm down, sweetie." Jackie bit her lip. "Sit down, maybe *think* before you yell."

Jane hadn't realized she'd gotten to her feet. There was acid in the back of her throat. She really shouldn't have come to the coffee shop. But the beautiful thing about that sameness between sisters was that Jackie had no idea who Jane was, exactly, and so when Jane left it wasn't like there was anyone who knew that Jane had been so goddamn foolish.

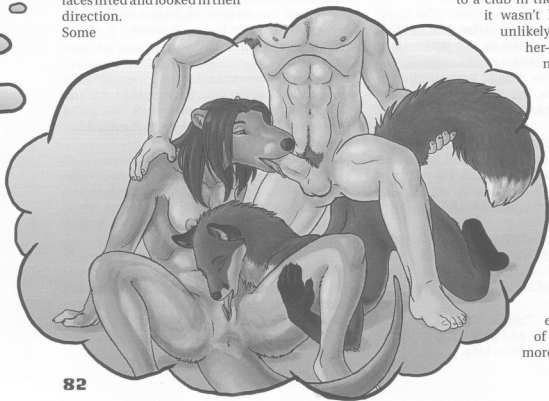
Had been so damn stupid.

Nobody really knew that Jane was *such a fucking whore*.

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Dance clubs were good. The fucking got a little mechanical sometimes, but dancers had such *great* bodies. The first guy was called Tad. Tod? Something with a T and a D. And, she'd kind of smiled at him right. She'd deliberately gone to a club in the furry district, so it wasn't like the guy was unlikely to find girls like her—genetic freaks of nature—*attractive*.

He took her home, which was a pretty depressing little place, and she'd pushed him onto the rug, and taken her panties off, and straddled him, and for a while she wasn't so hollow inside. Kind of literally, in the sense of fucking, and in a more emotional way



too because, you know. This... Tad, Tod, guy. He liked her, right? He must have, to share his body with her. Jane was A-Okay in his books.

He had to have liked her, because you don't fuck people you don't like. And maybe he'd like her *more* if she was a good fuck, maybe even call her again, so she kind of leaned back and did that thing Richard found so goddamn hot, where she'd catch a finger between the lips of her vagina and his penis, and pull it a little so the wet slapping got louder and he could see her genitals more clearly through the fur.

He moaned *just* right, and it was real easy to feel all in love again. In a sense that was what got her off, more than the mechanical grinding against his groin.

The slippery hours with, uhm, Tod. Had to be Tod. They were a little awkward, but he was happy to roll back onto her. He didn't call her afterward, though, and that hurt a little. Because, she, actually kind of really wanted him to care about her. But the next time she saw him he was with another girl, so, like. Whatever. Bastard.

Maybe Richard was doing that too, with that bitch who left her toothpaste lying around. Fuck, maybe, uh. Maybe Tad was fucking her too? Irrational thought, but that'd be pretty damn fitting. A grand way to cap off Jane's life.

There were a couple of others, but she didn't bother trying to stay around for the slippery hours anymore. Not, not often anyway. It didn't work out too well.

Then there was, uhh. A Jay guy. George, James. One of those. He'd kissed her on the mouth, and he did that every time she found him which was, for the week she knew him, three nights in a row. So she invited him to stay the night, y'know? So there could... could be slippery hours.

But, uh, he said she was alright to fuck, but he really preferred vixens, he said. The ones with the surname "McCall". They were really good fucks, apparently, and, maybe a threesome would be fun? So Jane hadn't seen him for awhile, another week maybe.

It was a bad week. She'd felt all hollow again, so when she saw him again she was desperate to feel *something* and the threesome hadn't turned out that bad. Just really awkward, probably because it was her first. The taste of other women was not her thing, although, uh. Even though the pretty fox's face between her thighs had been awkward, it was okay.

There were a couple of happy moments and those were enough, so the next time around she and the fox, Charlene, had picked up a guy together. And, uh. He'd, uhm. He'd been pretty content to watch Jane and Charlene fuck. In fact that's what Charlene had told him they were going to do, so he didn't touch Jane at all. Just watch.

Maybe if Charlene had just, like. If they met up at a party or something, fine? It would have been cool? Whatever. Otherwise, Jane just wanted to forget about how manipulated she'd felt.

Maybe... maybe that would've made Richard happier? If she'd done that for him, spread open another girl's thighs and lapped at her while he watched? Two furry girls rubbing their tits over his cock? Or maybe if she just did it with whatsurface bitch, with the toothpaste. Would he love her then? For real, this time?

But that wouldn't really change the fact she was, you know. A whore. Or slut. Or something.

Two guys at once was pretty nice. She was getting into that. It, it felt... It was difficult to explain how it felt. At first she just got guilty when she thought about it, but now that it was familiar it was actually kind of fun? It'd be great if it were just... stable.

With Luke she felt like she could be happy, sometimes. Jane knew Luke pretty well, although she'd had to stop trying to call him the day after. He'd usually have some guy he knew with him. That was a usual thing if she hadn't found someone to... y'know, go home with. Her on her knees with a warm heat between her legs and the comfortable pounding of Luke behind her while she wrapped her lips around his friend's dick.

She felt guilty sometimes, but the hollowness went away on nights like that. There were two

guys who liked her, and even though Luke refused to have any kind of deep emotional attachment whatsoever, he did start answering her calls. It was sort of friendly. She didn't have to worry if, like, he was running around with other women. She *knew* he was. He was running around with a lot of guys, too.

It wasn't threatening. It was a fun way to spend an evening. It was very casual, and it was very comfortable. It was just not going to go anywhere deep and emotional, ever, and she... sorta wanted it to.

Yeah. It'd been maybe three months since the break up? Okay so two or three weeks was not the kind of thing you base your life around but she *liked* Luke. He made great breakfast and he didn't get sticky about the whole sleeping around thing, like Alan had.

She'd really liked Alan, too. Alan was another fur, this tall grey tabby, and it was true about furs being good kissers, because he kissed her on the mouth a lot. She'd kind of been afraid he might have a rough dick, like, that was the rumor about cats? But when they'd engineered furs, in general, they'd made them as human as possible—even in *that* way.

But you know she wasn't actually in *love* with Alan. Because Jane knew what love was, and love was basically a bunch of chemicals Richard had. Alan had said he was in love with her, which felt great even if it was a stupid lie. He'd told her that and scraped his claws gently down her leg, which kinda hurt a little but it tingled really good.

So he said he was in love with her, and, she'd freaked out a little and went to Luke for advice and ended up in the sack with him—he didn't have a friend around that night and she hardly ever got him to herself. Except, you know. Alan wasn't really happy with the number of guys she was fucking. So that didn't help.

But. Whatever. Alan had like, a hundred brothers? More? She'd met one, Ewart. Sleeping with Ewart only helped for a little while and then she missed Alan again and she'd called him, but, guess what? He'd ended up with some girl called Gail.

*Fuck Gail. Fuck Alan.*

Somebody else would fall in love with Jane tonight. Someone better than Alan. It'd work out this time. She'd stay away from Luke and she'd be happy.

The washroom wasn't familiar; it was at a club she didn't know too well. She needed to go somewhere new so she could meet a new guy. A guy it'd maybe work out with, but she didn't really want to think about if it'd work out with him next week, or even the next morning. Just, just about her lipstick, which was candy-apple red and glossy.

She licked her lips and surveyed herself in the washroom mirrors. The automated ads on them had trouble working out what kind of product to offer her, settled on the lipstick brand she already used.

Jane ignored the ads and gently teased open her lipstick. Set it to her lips and edged it along towards the corner of her mouth, down her over-long muzzle.

There was a groaning in the stall down to one end of the washroom. A guy. *Very* happy guy. A guy who was moaning in *exactly* the way Jane liked to hear. This was the women's washroom; it did not take rocket science to figure out what was going on in there.

So she lingered over the lipstick. Partly because she was in one of those moods, and the feel of applying it was just a little erotic, and partly because she wanted to see who the guy was.

When he got out of the stall he was very subdued and embarrassed, face flushed. Human guy, obviously. Most guys were human. He glanced at Jane in the mirror with a decidedly sexual, and kind of delicious, leer. And then he cleared his throat awkwardly and ducked out of the washroom, hitching his pants higher around his waist.

Yeah. He'd be good. Love could wait. It could just be casual tonight, and she wouldn't have to have her emotions all tangled in a lump. She could just fuck him, and get off, and go home happy.

She dabbed at her lipstick to even it just a little and looked back at the mirror. Except now there were two Janes. One of the Janes had a couple of droplets of semen on her chin, caught in the fur just at the end of her muzzle, which, lately, would not be all that out of place for Jane.

The other Jane was also dragging a hanky out of her purse, and she was wearing a different dress. Her hair was a slightly darker shade of red.

"I thought they preferred it when you swallow, but." The other Jane padded carefully at her fur. Parted her lips just enough to reveal ever so slightly sharpish teeth. "I don't know. Maybe he was scared I meant it literally?"

Jane looked away from the mirror, and at her sister, because she just did not need that kind of disorientation on just a couple of shots of vodka. She cleared her throat awkwardly. "Uhm. Hi."

"Oh shit." The other Jane laughed, a short wheezing kind of laugh that Richard had said he loved, and now Jane knew why. Because he'd heard it before and bought that damn pheromone—bought *her*—so he could get it any time he wanted. "You're not Jo, are you?"

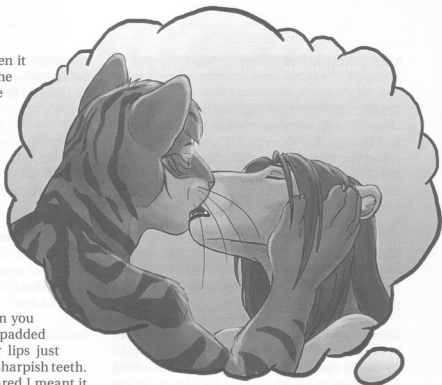
"No." Jane shook her head. "I, I'm just Jane."

"Plain Jane? No extra Ns, not a nickname?" Jane's sister lightly dabbed semen out of her fur. Carefully. Because if it smeared it just went sticky and God-awful. Jane knew all about that.

"Plain Jane." She glanced back at the door. "I, uh. I don't know Jo."

"I'm Jennifer." Jennifer spat on the hanky, lightly pinched at her fur to clean it. "Are you the one Jackie told me about? She didn't remember your name."

Jane froze. Hesitantly she nodded. "Yeah."



Jennifer juttied out her jaw, shifting it this way and that, twisting her lip to try and see if she'd cleaned herself up right. "I was Nineteen, and I dropped out of college to work for the guy."

Jennifer rinsed off the hanky under a faucet. "We were very happily in love and it was okay if he came home with the smell of other women on him, because I loved him. We'd make it work out, y'know?" Jennifer stared at Jane out of the corner of her eye. "And I was his executive assistant, so—oh. Hey. What do you do for a living?"

"Desk secretary for a legal firm."

"You ever fuck your boss?" Jennifer spread open the hanky under the hand driers. Ducked the end of her muzzle into the air flow.

Fur prickled up over the back of Jane's neck. "That's *private*. That's *my private life*."

"It feels good, doesn't it? Rich, powerful guys. They are *great* for the ego. But they are not young and flexible," Jennifer continued with a sigh, as if Jane hadn't said anything. "However," she made a sharp gesture, "you can actually. Y'know. Get nice things from them and it's like they really love you, right? Presents equal love. Remember how they used to do that to us as

kids, before we had names? When we were just numbers?"

Jane had collected gold star stickers. She'd stuck them to each other and made little necklaces and things. *Everybody* had. The staff had given them out and told the girls how special they were, that they were loved very much and so everybody wanted gold star stickers.

Jane pulled her purse tightly to her chest. "Shut up." It wasn't because of that one night she was working late with Mister Marino. It was just *one night*. It was just secretary's day, that was why he'd given it to her. It wasn't even her favorite purse, not anymore.

Jennifer quirked an eyebrow. "Sorry." She gazed at herself in the mirror and added, "Anyway. So I was his executive assistant, and I, obviously, had access to his financials. He'd been buying stuff from Estian Incorporated—"

"They're out of business. They folded after the law changed. They're bankrupt."

"Bankrupt doesn't mean gone. So I want to know what the hell he's buying from the bastards who made us, and. Oh." Jennifer paused theatrically, removing a thin tube of lipstick from her purse. "There's a little vial in his travel-bag."

Jane stared, her eyes wet.

"So I ask, say sweetie, what's this thing here?" Jennifer dabbed the lipstick onto her lips. It was even Jane's damn brand. "Oh it's nothing honey," she drawled, voice mockingly low, "it's just, y'know. If they sold you they needed a way to guarantee customer satisfaction..."

Jane felt *sick*. "How the fuck can you not tell people? Why didn't someone *tell me*?"

Jennifer twisted her head, one ear flicking straight. "You know how many of us are happily in relationships? Happily *married*?" She let out an amused grunt. "Do you really think this happened to all of us?"

Jane didn't have an answer for that.

"Besides." Jennifer let her head hang for a moment, putting her lipstick away. "What do you

think telling them they're all sexed up sluts, for sale to the guy who smells right, would do to them?" She looked back up at the mirror sharply.

"It's *not fair*. Someone should've told me."

Jennifer glanced back at Jane for a lengthy moment. "How long ago'd it happen?"

"I don't know. I met him last year, and. It. It was an affair at the start, because he was breaking up with his old girlfriend, and, then there was this other one but he got rid of her, and." Jane took a shaky breath. "I found out about it three months ago."

Jennifer winced. "What's his name?"

"Richard Tolbert." Jane's voice quivered. "You fuck him too?"

Jennifer, thank God, shook her head. "You need to spread it around that he's bad news. And that he cheated on you, and whatever else you need to do to make sure none of the rest of us fall for him. Okay?"

"What?" Jane tensed. "You think he's going to..."

"My Daniel did it." Jennifer shrugged, her voice turning hollow. "I should have said something. But I didn't, and it's too late. They're married now."

Jane pushed her back up against the washroom sinks. Her mascara was probably running, too. She kicked at the washroom floor with the toe of her high-heels. "*Fuck*," she yelped.

Jennifer didn't reply, just swept her hair back over her shoulder.

"What the hell do I do now?" Jane dragged the furred back of her wrist across her eyes, running mascara or no running mascara. "Book myself into a convent? Kill myself? What?"

"Convents won't take you. Apparently we don't have souls, since we're basically animals, so..."

Jane let out an aggravated squeal, stamped her foot again. She could feel a bitter amusement



building in her and that just brought more tears to her face. "That's *not* helping me." Looked back to find Jennifer holding out another hanky.

"Is that, uhm." Jane's ears tensed.

"No." Jennifer shook her head bemusedly. "I cry a lot, so." A smile dragged up the side of her muzzle. "I keep spares."

"Okay." Jane let out a breath and took the hanky, buried her face in it. "What do I do now, Jennifer?"

"Do you enjoy sex?"

"Yeah."

"Good, that's healthy."

"It's just..."

"Just what?"

"It's all so fucked up. Emotionally. I can't keep it straight in my head, and nice guys just. They just can't deal with the way I, I kinda like going home with different guys sometimes, and... Fuck."

Eventually Jennifer sighed and shook her head. For a moment she looked tired. Older than twenty-three. "How would you feel about a blind date, Jane? With a guy who understands."

and she

"Jane. Just... plain Jane?"

"Plain Jane," she confirmed. "And you're, uhm."

"Dickey." He was self-conscious about his front teeth. They were all buckish, and he didn't seem to quite know what to do with his ears. Long ears, too. Up, down. Flat, up, sideways. "Dickey Warne. My batch ended up with a lot of cutesy names. Benji, Petey. The female production run had Flopsy and Mopsy and all, if that, uh, means anything to you."

"Beatrix Potter. We had children's stories for memorization practice." She settled her chin on her hand, blinking at him slowly.

Dickey blinked a little. "Yeah. So." He smiled, a little. A little more, and she could see his teeth. Yeah, he was self conscious about it. He had *bunny* teeth. "That's just my little cross to bear. Dickey."

White rabbit. Blue eyes. Big blue eyes that she was trying not to look at, but failing. Jane let her eyes wander around the little bar, quiet in the afternoon. "So, uh. What, what do you do for a living, Dickey?"

He gathered his hands up on the table, meshed his fingers together slowly around his glass. "Geriatric nurse. I guess you're a PA, office admin, something like that?"

"Yeah. Secretary at a legal firm." She nodded. "That's, uhm. That's pretty much what most of us do."

Dickey's ears straightened out slowly. "A brother I grew up with, Tommy. We got adopted together. He's a personal trainer. There are a pretty big clique of us doing this kind of thing, actually. Us and, the female production run." Dickey bit at his lip, just for a second. Showing off those big bunny teeth. Jane snuck a glance, because even if he was self conscious about it, it was cute.

Jane found herself biting her lip too. "So you guys are all, like. Nurses and personal trainers?"

"And physiotherapists and daycare attendants." Dickey swirled his drink. "Variety of things. There was this idea that Japan's swelling elderly population was going to be an international trend, and..." He was acting sober, for a guy with a cocktail in his hand.

"And. It's really expensive to hire live-in care," she offered.

Dickey's eyes lifted slowly. "Mhmm. Of course nothing ever got proven. Company documents are sealed because of litigation, but that's pretty much what we're guessing." He smiled half-heartedly. "Of course if I wanted to learn Japanese, there's an agency over there."

"Usagi," she teased.

His eyebrows shot up. "You've seen the ads."

Jane nodded a little, picking up her drink. "So. You know about my run? I don't just mean about the secretarial aptitude, I mean—"

"Yeah," he blurted. "That's why I'm still in touch with Jennifer, actually. Comparing notes about what we think they were going sell us for."

"You ever, uhm..." She wanted to use a nice harsh word, like fuck. But that didn't seem right, too accusatory. She cleared her throat. "You ever sleep with her?"

"Uh, no. Very polite girl. She said no. But I tried. We met dancing." Dickey bit his lip again. Glanced aside. "Is that going to be a problem, or?"

"No." Jane let out the tense breath that'd been building. But there was another one. "So you go dancing?"

He shook his head. "I'm in geriatrics now. I'm up at five, six in the morning." He shrugged slightly. "So I can't be out all night, not like I used to while studying. Except maybe a week-end here and there."

Dancing? Yeah, he *did* have a nice slim body. Jane took another sharp little breath to steady herself. Picked up her glass and took a tiny sip. "Yeah, I, uhm. I like dancing too."

"Yeah? That's cool." His smile was a little lopsided. "My, uh. My big problem was that the girls kinda got weirded out when I tried calling them the morning after." His left ear took a long, languid dip.

Jane felt her heart pound, just the once. She cleared her throat a little. Dragged her toes on the ground underneath her chair. "Yeah, I, I kinda have that problem myself."

"Really."

Pretty blue eyes. He had such *perfect* pretty blue eyes and she didn't want to stare at them, but, she kind of had to. Her tummy fluttered, like it had butterflies. God, it hadn't done that in a long time.

She couldn't resist his tail. It was short, and was really fluffy, and she could thread her fingers through the fur, and it was soft. Jane clenched her hand in it, it was all wispy and—

"Owww." His ears flattened out and he shot her a reproachful look.

"Oh God, I'm sorry!"

"No, it's okay. I like it." He reached back. "It's just if you wanna play with my tail you just, kinda... need to squish, not yank."

Dickey's hand was warm on hers. Firm, when he pushed her hand up against the small of his back, so the fur of his tail bunched up between her fingers.

"Squish, squish, not yank. Okay..." She took an embarrassed little breath and kneaded at the fur. Pushed his tail against his back.

He ran a hand down her flat stomach, brushing against the damp patches he'd made kissing her. Not quite *elsewhere*, though. Not yet. She was looking forward to that. "No pouch," he said softly.

Jane felt a little heat in her face and offered a little smile. A tiny little shrug. "Maybe they couldn't afford to build me one?"

He didn't seem to mind, just ran his hand over her stomach and onto her breast and back over her shoulder. Kissed the part of her where her rib-cage lifted off her stomach, and that was really good.

Dickey settled back down beside her on the bed, his erection kind of wedged in against the side of her leg while he kissed at her face until he found her lips. He was a good kisser. A really, really damn good kisser. His tongue was kind of warm in her mouth, and his mouth was all warm around hers, and the feel of his teeth on her tongue, her lips... She really didn't understand why he was self conscious about it. It was *nice*.

Jane shut her eyes and nuzzled her face against Dickey's "Tell me, uhm. Tell me, I, I'm—"

"You're beautiful," he grunted in her ear. "You know that?"

"No I'm not." It wasn't much of a protest. Especially not when she twisted her head around to lay the side of her long muzzle against the side of his short one.

Dickey shuffled on the bed, 'til one of his knees was between hers, straddling her thigh. He kissed the side of her face, ears so low they bumped off her shoulder. "Yeah you are. Pretty and perfect."

How would he be able to know that after, uhm. Six hours? Okay so they'd had drinks and talked, and, uh. Gone back to his place. She'd told herself no sex on the first date but she *liked* him. So he'd already gotten off once tonight and it was kind of exciting, because maybe while that rumor about rabbits and, and the whole insatiable fucking thing wasn't true, he was *really* energetic.

Okay, maybe it *was* true? He wasn't like in the pornos, but, *God* he was energetic. Strong firm arms, from lifting patients into wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Little firm lengths of muscle under his fur. Mmmm...

But then his mouth closed over hers and for a little while she could believe him. Maybe he *did* know. He knew what she liked, anyway. Knew how to, roll her onto her back and lift her leg a little so that when he thrust into her, his stomach brushed her thigh and her tail was free to flap out in between his legs.

Knew how to push his stomach against her thigh so she could hook her knee around his back and, just. Just keep him where she wanted him. Warm and hot, and, sliding in and out of her exquisitely, the lunges of his body held in check by her leg. She kinda let her leg sag, sag, until she was awkwardly spread-eagled in front of him and he *loved* that. He set his palm down over where they were... linked, while they made love? Where, his, his, uhm. His *dick*, was in her. And, God, his hand was hot. Not on them, down there, but kind of, around there. Like it spread the heat across her pelvis.

Okay, maybe, maybe he *did* know. Maybe he was right, that she was perfect, and—

"Your body's..." He had a little quiver, in his voice. Slowed down a little. "Body's perfect," he groaned. "Oh God. *Jane*."

And. And, uhm. She remembered to squish, not yank. His tail was soft in her hand. And she felt really good. Kind of, hot-cold, twitching inside kind of good. Twitching a lot, spasming, whispering his name back at him (and not having trouble remembering what it was for once) good. *Very* good, actually. Shuddering breathlessly for long tangling moments, tingling inside, all fiery, his hand feeling so good just there, little jolt of her hips while he thrust, good.

And her voice sounded really good, in that kind of happy yelp he responded to with a groan. It took him a little longer, just a little, and it kinda hurt but it wasn't a bad hurt, just a kind of... over stretched can't-catch-your-breath feeling. And even though he was done he didn't pull away or anything he just, just kind of leaned back and thrust forward again, real slow, his dick a little softer, and. And... And that way she could still feel the fire from before, when she was getting off, in a kind of yearning, unreal way.

And Dickey kissed her, and everything was sweet. Just, just sweet. It, it didn't hurt, or feel awkward, or anything. It, it just felt sweet.

God, how sweet it was when he whispered her name longingly and he settled down over her, his ears sagging tiredly down over his shoulders. His chest against hers, her body tingling.

Especially sweet, because she didn't need to figure out what was going to happen tomorrow or whether or not she was going to stay the night, or wonder where she'd left her panties, or anything. Just, uhm. Just maybe kiss Dickey back.

He... he was going to call tomorrow. She was sure of it.

~~~~~

Okay. So. *Last* week, Jane had gone dancing. She didn't go dancing often anymore, just, just now and then, and she'd come home with a guy. It was fun, just, not... *fun*, fun. And she was a bit nervous about it, but she told Dickey, and he was very matter of fact about it.

This was the, uhm. Second time. Jane was really embarrassed about that, but Dickey was still around. His blue eyes were still... nice and, big and blue. And when he looked at her with them, she felt pretty. He understood. He used to sleep around, but he didn't sleep around much anymore. He didn't have the time, and that was good. She'd forgive him if he did, but that was good.

They sort of found out, together, that the slippery hours were now about... about eleven in the evening to maybe one in the morning? Dickey might complain, but it was 'til one in the morning. Not on weekends, though. Weekends the slippery hours went on for a long, *long* time, and Dickey had picked up that thing about kisses. Kisses *elsewhere*.

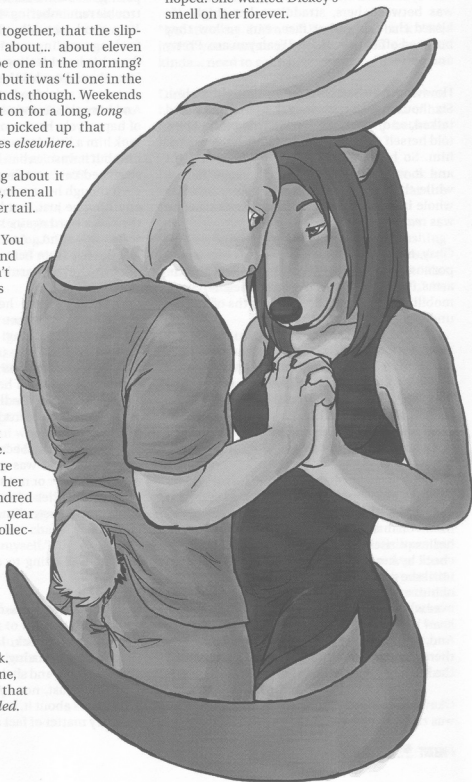
*Elsewhere.* Just thinking about it made Jane's spine tingle, then all the way up and down her tail.

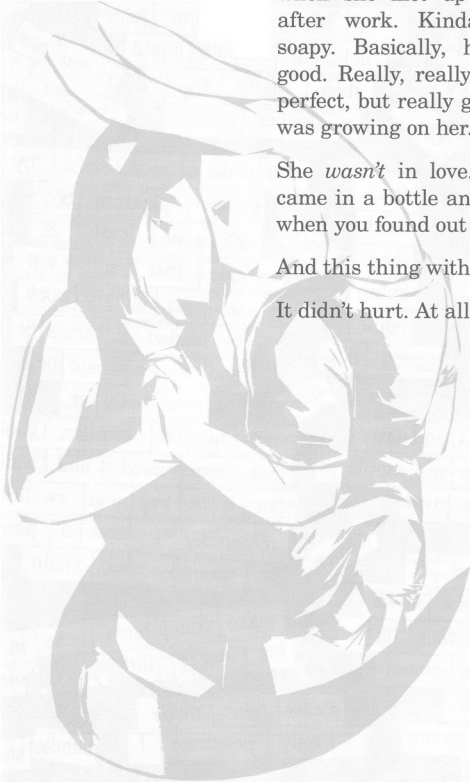
Okay. So. Three weeks. You don't base your life around three weeks, it wasn't a long time. But it was good, and, Dickey called her when a patient of his died. That night he'd kind of sobbed his eyes out with her, which was new. Very new. Boys, in Jane's experience, did not share *feelings*. It wasn't sexy at all, but, Jane didn't care. She *wanted* to be there for him, while he told her about the kindly old hundred and thirty-something year old man who had this collection of photographs on paper, from when he was a kid.

Dickey, Dickey worked with really old people. And there was a death... pretty much every week. And he needed someone, and she was going to be that someone. She had *decided*.

It was kinda weird, because... they'd made her to be the whore, and he was the one that had been made to help people? Kinda, a mix up of roles?

Three weeks. Going on four. Gonna be a month. Then, uhm. Then maybe more than a month, she hoped. Please-please-*please* hoped. She wanted Dickey's smell on her forever.





Dickey didn't smell like Richard at all. He smelled kinda... soft. And squishy, and disinfectanty when she met up with him after work. Kinda, sweaty-soapy. Basically, he smelled good. Really, really good. Not perfect, but really good, and it was growing on her.

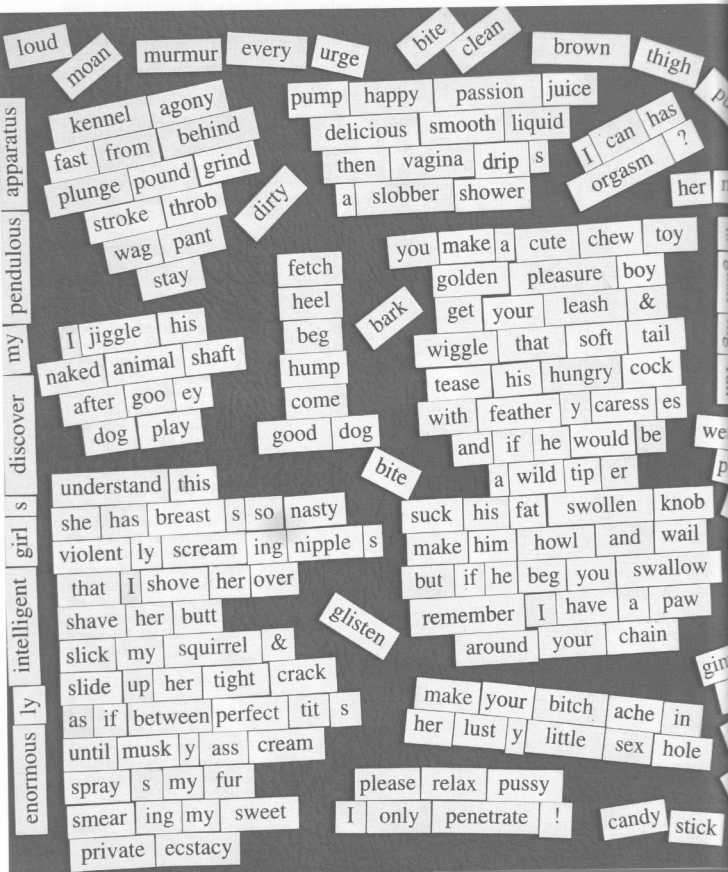
She *wasn't* in love. No. Love came in a bottle and hurt you when you found out about it.

And this thing with Dickey?

It didn't hurt. At all.

# Animal Magnetism

FRIDGE NO. 3, TOTAL NO. POETS: 5







**H**ere we are at the end of another issue of Heat. As always, I'm dog tired—but it's a good kind of tired. We've pulled together another amazing group of creative talents to fill these pages with words and images that tell stories of all sorts. The process has been pleasantly light on drama, in part due to ever-improving organizational techniques and procedures here at Sofawolf Press. Perhaps with the *next* issue I'll finally have my workflows in order to allow me to finish the process during the dreary days of Minnesota's winter, leaving me more free time to enjoy the wonderful transformation that is springtime. We're getting there! In fact, by the time you read this, I hope to already be started on the next issue.

You may have noticed, when reading through the short stories in this issue, that love and romance are not always what you (or the main character) first believed. Some of the twists and turns are quite obvious and abrupt, such as in "At a Glance" and "Learning to Live". Others are more subtle, such as the reassessment of pack taboos in "Prehistoric" or of one's former relationship in "Talk With Your Mouth Full". The most complex and developed take on this subject is "Dick and Jane". And yet, for all the appearance of a "theme" in this issue, I can take no credit for it; it just so happens that these are the stories that rose to the top of the submission pile. I have no complaints! I'm pleased that with each issue we can share with our readers stories that elevate erotica beyond the depiction of the mere mechanics of sex and what appendage gets inserted where, to explore what love and sex means to the characters and the lives they lead.

So, finally, if you liked what you saw in these pages, please visit the websites of our many contributors and let them know how much you enjoyed their works. None of this would exist without their efforts!



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With vigilant eyes, we're never alone.  
Your trepid smiles redden my ears.  
Oblivious, as I whimper and moan.

Your flawless tail, I have never known.  
I wish I was one of your playful peers.  
With vigilant eyes, we're never alone.

I want you, I need you, not be unknown  
You prickly my fur, a forest of spears.  
Oblivious, as I whimper and moan.

Truth be told, I can no longer atone  
I could be contented for countless years.  
With vigilant eyes, we're never alone.

Delighting the bliss right after you've blown,  
Reaching around, I can cherish my tears.  
Oblivious, as I whimper and moan.

Peer down through your window,  
Right to the bone  
I'll trot over to collect souvenirs.  
With vigilant eyes, we're never alone.  
Oblivious, as I whimper and moan.

EKULF